

## In Science Policy, Who Holds the Power?

The Office of Science and Technology, strategically ensconced in the White House, is the highest-ranking science group in the Government. No other body has as broad a responsibility for examining and trying to coordinate the Government's scientific involvement.

Yet its absolute powers are nonexistent, and its effective powers are only those that accrue from the weight of its prestige. Agency heads do not have to listen to it, and unless the President decides to lend his weight to one of its recommendations, it causes little fear in the scientific community.

Now, however, a report prepared for the House Military Operations Subcommittee by the Library of Congress' Science Policy Research Division (see page 335) has raised the question that has been on the minds of several Congressional committees: should OST be given the power to enforce its own recommendations?

OST is less than five years old, a mere infant among Government agencies, but in that short time the area over which it is supposed to watch has changed radically. These changes, according to the report, range from the stabilization of Sino-Soviet relations with the U.S. to the increased emphasis on social and economic problems, to the leveling off of research and development budgets with the resultant "inflamed competition" for science funds.

The report could become the basis of Congressional hearings to hammer out legislation designed to give centralized scientific policy power to some individual or agency, several policy advisers believe, but the present structure of committees, councils and commissions in the Federal science establishment is so gnarled that no one knows who the winner would be likely to be.

At the top of the heap are OST and its Federal Council, and the President's Science Advisory Committee, all headed by Dr. Donald F. Hornig, the President's Science Adviser.

Tangled up in the list are:

- The National Science Foundation which once had the responsibility for doing what is now OST's job—coordinating Federal research programs. But it lacked the muscle to direct the activities of agencies such as the Defense Department and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. So the job was shifted to OST.

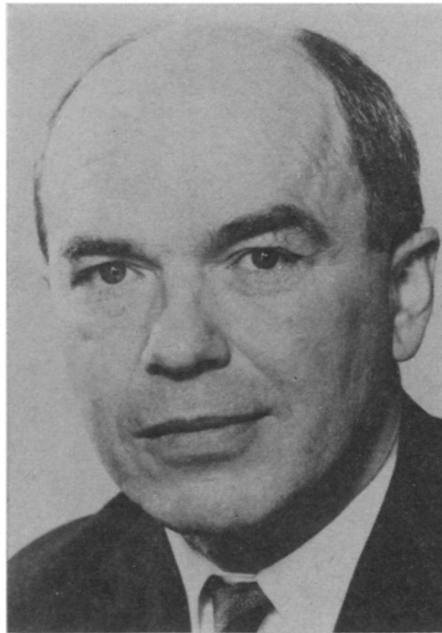
- The National Academy of Sciences, a prestigious private but Congressionally-chartered group, which provides advice to Federal agencies and

has a strong if unofficial role in establishing policy.

- The National Aeronautics and Space Council, set up by the 1958 Space Act to set policy and direction for the space programs of NASA, DOD and the score of other agencies involved in space.

- The National Marine Resources Council, set up last year to do for a dozen ocean-oriented agencies what NASC was to do for space. Both NASC and NMRC functions are duplicated somewhat in OST.

- The influential science chiefs of each of the major Federal agencies, some of assistant secretary rank and some, like defense and space, even more free-wheeling in policy matters because



Dr. Hornig: atop the gnarl.

of the size of the programs over which they preside. These are also the men who sit on the Federal Council.

If Congress does decide that the power should be centralized somewhere, OST might well lose out. Its present role is so vague that the lawmakers could decide to simply reorganize the whole mass, giving the scepter to some group that may not even exist yet.

There have been repeated suggestions in the past that a Department of Applied Sciences be established to actually set policies and determine the balance that should be given the practical scientific problems in various fields. No such study of balance has ever been made, the report points out. The National Academy of Sciences has not responded to the mutually-agreed-upon request by the House Science and Aeronautics Committee to analyze the relative emphasis of different fields to sup-

port national goals, and OST has failed to request any such study.

One body that is at least equipped to do this kind of weighting is the Federal Council on Science and Technology, a sub-group of OST. The Council is made up of a series of sub-councils, each one devoted to a specific problem or discipline and including a member from each interested agency. However, says one of the officials who helped prepare the report, though the sub-councils have been attending to their respective disciplines, the Council itself has done very little about taking an overall view.

The report attempts to set forth information without evaluation, but a certain tone is visible in the choice of words. For example, Presidential Science Adviser Dr. Hornig was quoted as describing U.S. science policy as a "mosaic," while a few sentences later the report used the somewhat less-mild term, "fragmented."

Even if no legislation is soon forthcoming, the report will be a useful document, one official said. It is the first time that the morass of executive orders, reorganization papers and legislative documents that define the confused Federal science policy establishment have ever been coherently collected in one place.

## More Computers For the Campus

Computers, which have already invaded wide areas of industry, government and the professions, are also a new resource in learning that can increase the quality and scope of education for the college student.

This is the new direction urged as the goal of Federal Government support to colleges and universities by the President's Science Advisory Committee in a report on computers in higher education.

The Committee calls for a broad program to make college students of the 1970's as familiar with using a computer as they are with driving a car.

Unfortunately, computers are not as common as cars.

To make computers more available, the PSAC report recommends that the Federal Government give schools money to set up computer centers, perhaps putting up as much as three-quarters of the \$414 million a year expected to be needed by 1971-72.

The Government money would not be granted to individual researchers, but to the college or university for facilities many students and researchers would use. This would be a switch