

GENERAL SCIENCE

Political Ax for Scientists?

Furor in Washington and nation-wide scientific circles over dismissal of Dr. A. V. Astin as director of National Bureau of Standards focuses attention on heads of other bureaus.

► WITH SCIENTIFIC Washington in a turmoil over the ouster of the Director of the National Bureau of Standards, traditionally a non-political job, there is apprehension that more heads of scientific bureaus will feel the political ax.

Threats of mass resignations by scientists may give the Eisenhower administration sufficient warning to prevent the displacement of other chiefs of scientific bureaus.

Inevitably any scientist who is worth his salt will displease someone. It may be a person who wants what amounts to a fake recommendation for a commercial product. It may be someone who feels that some local project is being slighted. If political action can displace the honest scientist who does not yield to pressure, the scientific services of the government will be in a bad way.

That is why scientific groups that have never passed such resolutions before became vocal with success in demanding that Dr. A. V. Astin be kept as Bureau of Standards director at least until scientific committees investigate and report. They warn that scientific and technological agencies of the federal government must maintain "an atmosphere of disinterested investigation free from political and commercial pressures."

A sensitive position from the standpoint of protection of the public against drugs and foods that will harm health or pocket-books is the commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, formerly the Federal Security Agency. The present commissioner is Charles W. Crawford who has risen to that position through service in the organization since he joined it as a chemist in 1918.

The Surgeon General of the U. S. Public Health Service, Dr. Leonard A. Scheele, is also a career officer, in charge of major investigations and services of great importance to the national health.

In the Department of Commerce along with the Bureau of Standards is the U. S. Weather Bureau, a scientific organization. It is headed by Dr. F. W. Reichelderfer who has been chief since 1938 and before that meteorological officer in the U. S. Navy for 20 years. The weather is always controversial, especially so since there has been rain-making.

In the Department of the Interior, the U. S. Geological Survey, in charge of mapping and geological resources, is a major scientific bureau, headed by Dr. William E. Wrather, world-famous geologist.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is headed by Albert M. Day who joined this organiza-

tion in 1918 when it was the old Biological Survey in the Department of Agriculture. On April 17, it was announced Mr. Day is being replaced. This organization protects and administers many of the natural areas and resources of the nation and potentially is in conflict with invaders of the public holdings.

In the Department of Agriculture the various scientific bureaus are headed by scientists who are under Civil Service, supposedly immune to removal by political decision.

Such scientific leaders are traditionally not changed with political administrations, even though some of them are presidential nominations confirmed by the Senate. Many of them are under Civil Service as well as career men.

A few heads of bureaus that have much to do with science, research and technology have come to be political in their tenure, such as the Commissioner of Patents, Director of the Census Bureau, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Office of Education. Some, like the Director of the Bureau of Mines, have been surrounded by some political overtones, although the present director, John J. Forbes, has been in the bureau for 37 years.

Top science officials and administrators are known to be concerned about the rumored establishment of a personnel schedule by the Eisenhower administration that would cover confidential and policy-making positions and remove them from Civil Service regulations. This presumably could be used to open the way to removal of scientists and others who would not yield to political or business pressures.

The scientific employees of the government would be reassured if there were action by the new administration that gave evidence that research, development and testing activities will continue to be carried on in an atmosphere free of non-scientific pressures, and that administrators and project supervisors of scientific activities will continue to be chosen on the basis of their scientific qualifications.

No further attempts at political ousters would be concrete assurance in this direction.

Scientific societies and organizations that have made protesting statements concerning the Astin affair to the White House or to Secretary Weeks include the American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Institute of Physics, American Chemical Society, International Electrochemical Society, Washington Academy of Sciences, Philosophical Society of Washing-

ton, Washington Chapter of Radio Engineers, Federation of American Scientists and Atomic Scientists of Chicago.

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Astin Ouster Delayed Through Summer Months

► SECRETARY OF Commerce Sinclair Weeks on Friday, April 17, asked Dr. A. V. Astin to stay on as director of the National Bureau of Standards until the special evaluation committee headed by Dr. M. J. Kelly, president of Bell Telephone Laboratories, completed its study, expected in late summer or early fall.

Dr. Astin said he had agreed to continue as director regardless of his "personal opinions or wishes."

The Secretary's last-minute action, for Dr. Astin's tenure ended at midnight on April 17, had White House approval. Mr. Weeks stated, however, that there was "no question of Dr. Astin's permanent retention," but that it was felt that he would be "most helpful" in the evaluation study.

The Federation of American Scientists, a nation-wide organization of scientists, called the action "welcome but incomplete." The chairman, Dr. David Hill of Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tenn., urged a "full independent investigation of the motives and circumstances surrounding the Astin dismissal itself" addressed to the broader policy questions the ouster raised.

In announcing Dr. Astin's temporary retention, Mr. Weeks pointed out that "at no time has there been any intent, implied or otherwise, to cast reflections on the integrity of the bureau or on the professional competence or integrity of Dr. Astin."

Such differences as he had had with the director, Mr. Weeks stated, result "from a conflict with respect to administrative viewpoint and procedure."

On the day following the Secretary's announcement, Senator Edward J. Thye, chairman of the Senate Small Business Committee, announced that hearings on the affair, originally scheduled for April 22, had been canceled because they might "becloud the issue."

Secretary Weeks also said he had asked Dr. Detlev W. Bronk, president of the National Academy of Sciences, to appoint a special committee to "objectively appraise the quality" of the bureau's work involving battery additive AD-X2, their study to include both laboratory and field tests.

During the next several months, Mr. Weeks announced, the Visiting Committee of the Academy will be making a canvass to "bring forward a panel of names" from which he expected to select a new director of the bureau.

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There are special summer camps for *diabetic* children which may help the youngsters even more than other camps help non-diabetic children.