

NEW WORLD

Congress Deaf to Prophecies

"THAT we are in a budgetary crisis no one can doubt; nor can one doubt that the crisis was foreseen; and that we did little five years ago when the crisis was predicted precisely in the National Academy of Sciences' report to your Subcommittee." With appropriate expressions of regret Dr Alvin Weinberg, director of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, assumed last week the not wholly unpleasurable role of Cassandra before the House Subcommittee on Science, Research and Development, which has now completed four weeks of hearings on the issue of whether the United States should develop a national science policy.

In a brief but forceful statement, Dr Weinberg reminded his listeners of the forecast made in 1965 by the NAS committee, of which he was a member, that the basic physical sciences would face a major funding crisis because the agencies that had accepted responsibility for them were not at that time being permitted to expand. The committee had also recommended that the National Science Foundation should become a billion dollar agency by 1970. "It is little consolation to this subcommittee and its distinguished chairman (Mr E. Q. Daddario) to have foreseen as they did in the 1965 hearings the present predicament of science, and yet not to have been able to implement the major recommendation of (the NAS committee) greatly to expand the National Science Foundation." Dr Weinberg added that in his view the expansion of the foundation was the most important single action to be taken and that if the subcommittee's hearings resulted in nothing else than achieving for the foundation a level of support equivalent to one-tenth of a per cent of the gross national product, or about \$1,000 million a year, he believed that they would have been brilliantly successful.

This reflexion evoked a notable disquisition on the limits of the subcommittee's power and the impotence that has tempered its nevertheless substantial record of achievement. Mr Charles A. Mosher, a Republican member of the subcommittee, observed that although in his opinion the committee had done an extremely important job over the years, "I don't see that it has had much impact on the rest of Congress or on the Congressional decisions, particularly those taken by the Appropriations committees. . . . Too often, it seems to me that the Appropriations committees [which grant the actual monies up to a maximum limit of, but often less than, the sum approved by the Authorization Committees] and the Authorization committees don't have any coordination or even communication. . . . I think it is a sort of mistake that we did as well as we did".

Referring to Dr Weinberg's statement that the subcommittee had heard predictions in 1965 of the present crisis, Mr Mosher continued, "We pointed to it, but who listened? I don't think there is the machinery by which our considerations in this committee are known

by more than a few people. I think the only [sc. effective] devices are really informal devices and the chance of a very vigorous personality. Now Mr Daddario, our chairman, is that type of personality and he has some personal impact. I don't think that the machinery itself, the legislative process itself, is effective or efficient in this regard. I regret to say it. I think it is crucial to the considerations we are discussing".

Mr John W. Davis, presiding over the subcommittee in Mr Daddario's absence, suggested that at least the authorization committees helped by preparing witnesses to make a better showing before the appropriations committees. Dr Weinberg, declining to comment on the relative influence of the two types of Congressional committees, at least agreed on the importance of the charismatic figures such as the late Representative Fogarty who persuaded Congress to keep the money flowing into the National Institutes of Health. Dr Weinberg went on to express his "highest regard for the new director of the National Science Foundation, Dr McElroy: I think he is going to be awfully, awfully good because he has that kind of public presence and dedication. . . . I hope he is the one who succeeds in putting across the suggestions that are in here and were in the committee report five years ago".

Like several previous witnesses, Dr Weinberg

CANCER RESEARCH

New Rationale

"SUPPOSE we could develop a vaccine that would immunize us against cancer, say with the same certainty as the Sabin vaccine immunizes against polio. . . . Now an important source (though by no means all) of our concern about environmental pollutants, particularly radioactivity, is prompted by the belief that these agents, even in tiny amounts, are carcinogenic. To prove or disprove their carcinogenic potential at the very low levels at which they appear in the environment is impossible. It seems to me that a more rewarding strategy would be to develop antidotes for the possible untoward medical sequelae of these pollutants. Of these sequelae, cancer is the most important. If cancer could be eliminated by vaccination, our whole attitude toward many environmental problems would change from panic to reason. Thus my plea for heavier support of the National Cancer Institute, and other biomedical research, is entirely consistent with the shift in emphasis toward the environment."—Statement by Dr Alvin Weinberg to the House Subcommittee on Science, Research, and Development.