AAAS

Scientists' Rights

by our Washington Correspondent

A HIGH level committee on safeguarding scientific freedom has been appointed by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The committee will establish review procedures for cases in which scientific freedom has been infringed and will report on the "general conditions required for scientific freedom and responsibility".

The AAAS announced last December that it would set up a committee in response to a request from Senator Edmund S. Muskie that it investigate the case of two scientists employed by the Atomic Energy Commission, John W. Gofman and Arthur R. Tamplin. Gofman and Tamplin alleged that the AEC had cut their staffs in retaliation for their criticism of the present radiation standards.

But the AAAS committee is charged only with laying a general framework for this kind of investigation and will not consider the Gofman-Tamplin or any other individual cases. The AAAS may not be greatly disappointed at this outcome—in the absence of an established procedure the investigation of Gofman and Tamplin's complaints against the AEC could have been a delicate matter since the AEC's chairman, Glenn T. Seaborg, is the new president of the AAAS.

The AAAS committee is chaired by Allen V. Astin, former director of the National Bureau of Standards. Other members are Mary C. Bateson, professor of sociology at Northeastern University, Walter J. Hickel, former Secretary of the Interior, John H. Knowles, director of the Massachusetts General Hospital, and Earl Warren, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

Astin, the chairman, has personal experience of the abuses the committee is investigating. In 1953, when director of the National Bureau of Standards, he was sacked by the then Secretary of Commerce after having criticized the efficacy of a battery additive known as AD-X2. With the help of protests from the scientific community, Astin was later reinstated.

Hickel, though not a scientist, is also aware of the hazards of speaking one's mind when in high position. He was fired from the Department of the Interior last Thanksgiving in retaliation for his public differences of opinion with the White House. Knowles too is no stranger to the way in which sectional interests operate in Washington; in 1969 his candidacy for the assistant secretaryship of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare is said

to have been blocked by the American Medical Association.

University scientists already have a defence against victimization in the existence of the American Association of University Professors, which appoints *ad hoc* committees to investigate individual complaints. The chief importance of the AAAS committee will be to devise procedures covering the more frequent instances of scientists in government agencies being persecuted for having spoken out of turn. Some four or five such cases have been checked out in detail by James S. Turner, a member of Ralph Nader's Center for the Study of Responsive Law. Turner, who plans to exchange ideas with the AAAS committee, is concerned with the way in which scientific information is often "diverted out" of the decision-making process in government agencies. "The scientific objectivity that is supposed to contribute to decisions is so often lacking that it is undermining the credibility of the regulatory agencies", Turner says. Information may be suppressed at many stages in the chain between the laboratory bench and the decision-maker at the top, leaving the individual scientist with the dilemma of whether to make his findings public and face the consequences.

SHUTTLE

Mondale's SST Flies

by our Washington Correspondent

FOR the second year in succession, Senator Walter F. Mondale has failed to block funds for NASA's shuttle, a vehicle which he looks upon with much the same proprietary interest as Senator William Proxmire regards the SST. Last week, by a 64-22 vote, the Senate authorized \$137 million for NASA to continue development of the re-usable space rocket. Undeterred by the size of their defeat, the Mondale forces point out that Proxmire campaigned for three years against the SST before he got anywhere; they are content at having exposed the holes in NASA's justifications of the shuttle programme, and will bide their time until NASA's budget comes before the Senate next year.

Mondale's aides attribute the strength of the pro-shuttle vote to the number of contracts, not yet placed, which NASA has in its gift; they claim that at least three senators who have voted against the shuttle before were lost for this reason. Nor do the anti-shuttlers enjoy the tremendous boost of the environmental sentiment which helped kill the supersonic transport. Nevertheless, Mondale's argument that the shuttle is a far grosser misallocation of

priorities than the SST—the greatest total cost NASA will at present admit to is \$12,800 million—may carry great weight in subsequent years when the shuttle's annual funding, at present comparatively modest, builds up to a more tempting target. Another factor in Mondale's defeat was probably the reluctance of most senators to add further to the unemployment in the aerospace industry.

The anti-shuttle movement was defeated last week in the House as well as the Senate, which was to be expected since the movement consists for the most part of Mrs Bella Abzug, a Representative from New York. What she lacked in allies, Mrs Abzug made up for in language. "The space shuttle is another camel's nose stuck under the tent of a three-ring circus," she told the House in introducing an amendment to delete funds for the shuttle from NASA's appropriations bill.

In the Senate debate on the shuttle, Mondale harped on arguments that can doubtless be dusted off and used again next year. Perhaps his most telling point was the fact that the total cost of the shuttle was estimated at \$9,000 million two years ago and at \$12,800 million in a study completed this year for NASA by the Mathematica Corporation. Citing the customary escalation of big hardware projects, Mondale predicted that the ultimate cost of the shuttle would be at least \$25,000 million.

Mondale also had fun with NASA's shifting justification for the shuttle—at first the shuttle was to service space stations from which men would be launched to Mars; now NASA has uncoupled the shuttle from the space station and claims that even if it carries only unmanned payloads into space the shuttle is economically justifiable. In an attempt to reduce the cost of the shuttle, NASA has recently decided to make the orbiter stage of the vehicle expendable. In response, Mondale quoted a statement by the Secretary of the Air Force, Robert C. Seamans, which seemed to put NASA out on a limb with this change of policy. "Present plans call for both the booster and orbital stages of the shuttle to be recoverable and hence re-usable", Seamans told the Senate committee on aeronautical and space sciences; "If we do not recover both stages, it's hard for me to see how the cost can be kept down."

For Mondale's opponents, his amendment to delete the shuttle funds from the budget was castigated as "a serious attempt to stop technological progress". Much play was also made about the Russian's success with the Salyut space station, which at the time of the debate was still inhabited by the three cosmonauts.