

## NEW WORLD

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

### Steuer Confirmed

by our Washington Correspondent

AFTER twenty minutes of gentle and rambling questioning of Dr H. Guyford Steuer last week, the Senate Committee on Labour and Public Welfare agreed, as everybody expected, that Dr Steuer is suitably qualified to be the next director of the National Science Foundation. The Senate later went through the formality of confirming his nomination, and Dr Steuer is now all set to take over from William D. McElroy who leaves the NSF in February next year to become chancellor of the University of California at San Diego.

Last week's gentle grilling—if a series of congratulations and a dialogue in which committee members had most of the say can be so described—elicited few surprises about Dr Steuer's policies for the NSF. Asked by Senator Edward M. Kennedy about his attitude to the RANN (Research Applied to National Needs) programme, for example, Dr Steuer replied that the programme "is a very important programme to the NSF" since it helps to turn out from the universities more students who are aware of society's problems and needs. The programme also happens to be one on which the NSF is particularly keen, in spite of congressional disfavour last year, and Dr Steuer's background as an engineer should help him in his arguments before Congress next year when he asks for more money for the RANN programme.

As for institutional support grants, which last year were severely reduced in the Administration's budget requests to Congress, reinstated by the authorizations committees but partially withheld by the Office of Management and Budget, Dr Steuer seemed to be in two minds. As a university president who has been particularly successful in getting NSF institutional support in the past, Dr Steuer considers such grants to be "very valuable", but the director-elect, perhaps toeing the Administration line, pointed out that when it comes to apportioning scarce resources, some areas are bound to suffer, the clear inference being that cutting institutional support may be less damaging than paring funds for particular areas of research—a drop in funds for high energy physics has already "contributed to unemployment", Dr Steuer said. Nevertheless, if Dr Steuer is put in the position of arguing for a cut in institutional support grants for the 1973 budget, somebody is bound to point to his testimony before the House Subcommittee on Science, Research and

Development in 1969, when he thoroughly endorsed institutional support as a particularly valuable instrument for stimulating basic research in the universities.



Dr H. Guyford Steuer, the next director of the National Science Foundation

That Dr Steuer would be acceptable to the Administration and to Congress has scarcely been in doubt since the National Science Board recommended his name to the White House nearly three months ago. His background as a scientist and engineer, administrator and veteran of the Washington science advisory network (see *Nature*, 234, 122; 1971) won him points with Congress and the White House was also impressed by the fact that he is a Republican who is unlikely to be at odds with the rest of the Administration on major policy issues. Dr Steuer's political background certainly ensured that there would be no repeat of the 1969 performance when Franklin Long of Cornell University had his nomination to the NSF with-

drawn by the White House because of his opposition to the ABM system.

ASTRONOMY

### New Face for Arecibo

by our Washington Correspondent

A CONTRACT has at last been awarded for resurfacing the 1,000 foot radio antenna at Arecibo in Puerto Rico. The work, which will cost about \$3.76 million, will take about two and a half years to complete, and should improve considerably the sensitivity of the telescope—allowing detection of about twenty times more radio sources than the presently known 5,000—and enable it to be operated at wavelengths as short as 6 cm, compared with the present minimum operating wavelength of 50 cm.

The chief objective of the work is to improve the accuracy of the surface of the telescope by replacing the present wire mesh with perforated aluminium panels—37,000 panels will cover the 18.5 acre surface of the antenna. To achieve the desired operating performance, the radius of the sphere must be accurate to within 3.2 mm at each point, compared to the present surface accuracy of about 1.5 cm, and the firm that has been awarded the contract, LTV Electro-systems Inc. of Dallas, Texas, estimates that the alterations will add some 100,000 pounds to the weight of the surface.

One of the terms of the contract is that the work should not be allowed to interrupt research with the telescope, and Mr Robert Matyas, Director of the Department of Construction at Cornell University, who is in charge of the operations, said last week that he is confident that any undue disturbance can be avoided since the resurfacing would be carried out on one area at a time.

## Federal Research and Development Expenditures

(Billions of dollars)

(Percent of R & D total)

