NEW WORLD

More Shuffling of the Pack

by our Washington Correspondent

SWEEPING changes in the federal science policy machinery are expected to be announced by President Nixon this week. At the beginning of the week, the final touches were being put to a reorganization plan which will abolish the Office of Science and Technology, the President's Science Advisory Committee and the position of Science Adviser to the President and give the director of the National Science Foundation responsibility for advising the White House on policies for civilian science and technology. The task of advising the President on policies for military research and development will be transferred from the OST to the National Security Council, the chairman of which is Dr Henry Kissinger.

The reorganization plan will give Dr Guyford Stever, director of the National Science Foundation, the dual responsibility of managing a federal agency and offering advice to the White House on general policy matters. But his advice will not go directly to the President but to the President's Economic Adviser, Dr George Shultz, who has recently been given the role of coordinating US economic policy (see *Nature*, 241, 158; 1973). The effect will, therefore, be to shift responsibility for advising on science policy from the President's Science Adviser, who at least had direct access to the President, to the head of a small government agency who has access only to a presidential adviser.

As for the OST, its demise has been predicted since Dr Edward E. David, who was director of the office and Science Adviser to the President, left Washington in a surprise move earlier this month (see *Nature*, 241, 82; 1973). Some of its staff are likely to be transferred to the National Security Council, others to the National Science Foundation, a few may go to the Office of Management and Budget, and the rest will be out of a job.

Sources close to the White House said this week that the initial idea will be for the National Science Foundation to be concerned chiefly with advice on civilian science policy, but advice on biomedical research policies will continue to come from the National Institutes of Health. There is some chance, however, that Dr Stever's role may eventually be broadened to include these fields as well.

The National Science Board, the

policy-making body which helps direct the work of the National Science Foundation, is likely to take on some of the functions that were the responsibility of the President's Science Advisory Committee. But its advice will go first to Dr Stever, then to Dr Shultz, then to the President and it will not concern itself directly with military research and development. The National Science Board has published reports on an annual basis for the past few years on various aspects of science policy, graduate education and manpower planning for example, but they have had little effect on the shaping of national policies. Whether it will have more effect in future will depend in part on the effectiveness of Dr Stever.

The new role envisaged for the National Science Foundation will in fact give it the functions that were assigned to it when the foundation was set up by congressional charter in 1950. The National Science Foundation Act gave the NSF the responsibility for evaluating the programmes of other agencies in the science field. But when the launching of Sputnik sent shock waves through the federal government, it was felt that the director of the NSF would not be able to provide strong oversight over mission-oriented science agencies, and President Eisenhower established the post of Science Adviser to the President directly in the White House. And five years later, President Kennedy set up the Office of Science and Technology, and gave it the task of coordinating the activities of all the federal agencies concerned with science and technology.

One reason why the wheel has turned full circle is that since 1968 the National Science Foundation has broadened its activities in supporting applied research—an amendment to the National Science Foundation Act, sponsored by then Representative Emilio Q. Daddario and Senator Edward M. Kennedy, gave the foundation authority to support applied as well as basic research. It was felt that this broader role enabled the National Science Board and the director of the foundation to take a better view of the whole federal involvement in science and technology. One factor which was unclear at the beginning of the week, however, is how Dr Stever will be able to resolve a possible conflict of interest. On the one hand, he will be director of an agency which receives federal support and on the other

he will be advising the White House on how it should be distributing funds to science agencies.

Clean Air Act

by our Washington Correspondent

RESIDENTS of Los Angeles were given a nasty shock last week. They were told by the federal government that if the city's smog-laden air is to be cleaned up enough to comply with the Clean Air Act, they will have to cut their use of automobiles by more than 80 per cent during the summer and equip their cars with pollution control devices costing between \$200 and \$400.

Those extreme measures were proposed last week by the Environmental Protection Agency which was under a court order to devise a scheme for meeting the primary air quality standards—which are designed to protect health—in Southern California by 1977. What the agency has proposed is a system of petrol rationing, beginning in 1975, which by 1977 would reduce petrol consumption in the Los Angeles basin by 82 per cent between May and October, when pollution is at its worst.

If the scheme is carried out, it will quickly bring the area to a grinding halt, for Southern California is virtually built around the automobile—there are 10 million people in the Los Angeles basin and 6 million cars, and because the city is such a sprawling metropolis it is almost impossible to get from one part to another without a car. It is also said that apart from its numerous drive-in banks, restaurants and cinemas, Los Angeles even boasts a drive-in funeral parlour.

A federal requirement which would probably wreck the economy and lifestyle of Southern California should be sufficient to provoke a mass revolt. But, although there has been some outspoken opposition to the plan, few people have taken it seriously. Even Mr William D. Ruckelshaus, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, made it clear when he unveiled the plan that he was only offering such a drastic measure because he was ordered by a court to come up with a scheme which would definitely meet the standards. His scheme may be unworkable, but it would comply with the Clean Air Act.

The EPA's plan will be the subject of public hearings in Los Angeles in the next few months and, as Ruckelshaus