food supply and they downplay the likelihood of such long-term hazards as cancer, genetic damage and birth defects".

He suggests two chief reasons for the food protection committee's alleged bias. First, it has close ties to industry through its funding—in 1972, 40 per cent of the committee's budget was provided by sources in industry—and through an industry liaison panel which gives industry "a privileged voice in committee affairs". And second, the committee's panels have seldom contained experts in mutagenesis, teratogenesis or carcinogenesis.

Asked last week for his comments on Boffey's charges, Dr Philip Handler, President of the National Academy of Sciences, called his speech "the greatest accolade we have received yet", the rationale behind that remarkable conclusion being that the two examples chosen by Boffey are well known and that the academy has already taken steps to deal with such problems. Handler argued that the academy has about 500 committees and if Boffey can only dig up those two "old chestnuts", there cannot be too many skeletons in the cupboard. Boffey points out, however, that those two examples were drawn from many which will appear in the final report.

Handler also drew attention to several reforms which the academy has recently instituted in an attempt to eliminate bias from its committees and to prevent the committees becoming too cosy with the contracting agencies. From January this year, for example, every committee member must sign a statement giving details of employment and consultantships in the past 10 years, research support during the past five, current financial interests and any publicly stated positions on the subject matter before the committee. To help overcome the problem of committees becoming aligned with the contracting agency, Handler pointed out that the academy has instituted a rule that members are appointed for fixed terms of three or four years and that reappointments must be closely justified.

But perhaps the chief reform instituted in recent years has been the setting up of a Report Review Committee under the chairmanship of Dr George Kistiakowski. The committee examines each report issued in the academy's name for scientific accuracy, possible bias and ambiguous phrasing, and suggests changes both to the committee concerned and to Handler. The committee consists of academy members.

But Boffey suggested that although such reforms are "worthwhile palliatives to the basic problems, they are by no means the complete answer", and likened the process to that of car manufacturers cleaning up exhaust emissions by fitting add-on catalysts instead of developing a non-polluting engine. As for bias statements, Boffey pointed out that many members of panels of the Food Protection Committee have come under attack for potential sources of bias but they are still serving.

The provision that members of committees should serve for fixed terms is a "totally inadequate response" to the problems of committees becoming too cosy with the contracting agency, Boffey suggested. It does not, for example, attack the problem of staff members of the academy being anxious to preserve contracts with the agencies, and Boffey said that he has "evidence of subservience to the executive branch as of two days ago".

As for the report review committee, Boffey says that "is one of the best things that has happened to the academy in recent years. It is a big step in the right direction". But even so, he believes that the committee could be made much more effective if its reports and comments were made public. He cited in his speech an example of a report by the Food Protection Committee on *Guidelines for estimating toxicologically insignificant levels of Chemicals in Foods* which was savagely attacked by a group of cancer experts, whose views were acceptable to the review committee. But the review committee's comments have never seen the light of day, and the academy is still in the position of seeming to support recommendations with which one of its most distinguished committees disagrees.

Essentially what Boffey is asking for is more public accountability in the academy. His study, the first independent investigation of the academy since it was founded during Lincoln's presidency in 1863, may help push the academy in that direction.

AMERICAN PHYSICAL SOCIETY

Pyrrhic Defeat

by our Washington Correspondent

THE membership of the American Physical Society has rejected a proposed amendment to the society's constitution which would have added to the present aims of the society, which are simply "the advancement and diffusion of the knowledge of physics", the words "in order to contribute to the enhancement of the quality of life for all people. The society shall assist its members in the pursuit of these humane goals and it shall shun those activities which are judged to contribute harmfully to the quality of mankind". Proposed by Robert H. March, a nuclear physicist from the University of Wisconsin, the amendment was defeated by 45,000 votes to 37,000.

March said last week that he is neither surprised nor disappointed at the vote, because the resolution has essentially become redundant. The society is already engaged in discussions of social responsibility through its newly-established Forum on Physics and Society, he said, and the council has come a long way during the past year towards agreeing with the views of several supporters of the amendment who simply wanted such issues debated. March himself was unhappy about the wording of the last part of the amendment, which has borne the chief brunt of the criticism, and at one stage was prepared to drop the part instructing the society to shun some kinds of activities (see *Nature*, **240**, 518 ; 1972). Legal difficulties prevented alteration of the proposed amendment, however.

Short Notes

Classified Research

DR Edward Teller, so-called father of the US H-bomb, last week urged Congress to pass a law requiring all secret government scientific research to be declassified a year after it is completed. Speaking at the annual meeting of the American Physical Society, Teller argued that secrecy hinders the progress of science and urged government officials to pay more regard to the damage resulting from overclassification than to the damage likely to result from making research results public. He also suggested that the efficiency of intelligence operations makes classification pointless for longer than a year, and included weapons design in his definition of scientific research.

DES Banned Again

When the Food and Drug Administration banned the use of the synthetic hormone diethylstilboestrol (DES) in animal feeds last year, it did not prevent farmers from implanting pellets of the hormone in the ears of cattle. Used as a growth promoter, DES produces the same effect when used as an ear implant as when added to cattle feeds. But last week, the FDA banned that use as well, making the ban on DES as an agricultural chemical complete. The hormone was taken off the market as a feed additive last year because radioactive tracer techniques showed that it remained in beef liver for up to 120 days, and thus could not be prevented from turning up in the meat supply. Since the hormone is highly carcinogenic, the FDA had no alternative but to ban it. The same sensitive tracer studies have now been applied to ear implants, and not surprisingly they have turned up the same results, hence the ban last week.