



## BUT WHO WILL JUDGE THE JUDGES?



In his book, *Contracting for Atoms* (The Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, 1967), Harold Orlans says, concerning AEC policy on administering contracts, "What is called for is a serious, critical, and independent evaluation of contractor performance... To obtain a detached appraisal of the performance of operating contractors, it is desirable in most cases to supplement the judgment of the cognizant AEC field office with that of headquarters staff..." To the extent that this recommendation implies close guidance of the contractor, we feel the recommendation is fallacious.

In private industry, it is wise, even necessary, to have one person or a small group of persons decide policy for a company. Companies are created to make a profit. If policy decisions are correct, a profit will be made. If not, a loss will occur, and the stockholders will throw out the policy makers or the company will fold. Thus strong incentives to make proper decisions and

strong corrective action to prevent repeated foolish decisions exist. We believe this profit motive works whenever the company has its own money or reputation at stake.

University-sponsored research is in most cases equally successful, because the decision to pursue a particular goal and the choice of methods by which to pursue it, while they may be made by a single individual, are nevertheless subject to the restraining and corrective action of a large group of people—his peers, the counterparts of industry's stockholders, who opine whether he has stature in the scientific world, whether his papers should be published, whether he should receive tenure, etc.

However, when real decision-making is taken over by a government agency, civilian or military, where are the controls ensuring wise decisions? Advisory committees appointed by the agency being advised are no assurance that the agency knows what it is doing. Theoretically, congressional committees are more responsive to the wishes of the people, but the people's wish is meaningless in trying to answer a technical question or evaluate a scientific program, and congressional committees, by their nature, cannot be expected to decide on scientific matters.

Government agencies are fine for administering matters of a governmental nature, e.g., ensuring compliance with the law, protection of the public, and cooperation between states, and for carrying out administrative procedures like taking the census, collecting taxes, and conserving national scenic spots and wild-life refuges. But the government is impossibly constituted for effective administration of businesses like mail delivery or projects requiring scientific judgment. This is because in neither case is there a mechanism for ensuring that the people who have to make the decisions are competent. (The fact that many competent people happen to be in government service does not ensure that this will always be so, nor does it mean they constitute a majority even now.)

We believe that the sensible way to manage research and development is for the sponsoring agency to worry more about the makeup of the companies and the laboratories that are to do the work and the competence of the researchers and their organizations. One useful criterion is the number and kinds of papers that the researchers publish in refereed professional journals. Then, having ascertained their competence, give the researchers or their organizations money, and let them use it as they see fit within a broad agreed-upon outline. From time to time verify that their competence continues high, but don't try to direct their work, except in the most general manner.

*Louis G. Stang, Jr.*