

Confusion Mounts Over Section 203

Section 203 restricts fiscal 1970 defense-supported research to projects clearly related to military needs (PHYSICS TODAY, May, page 61). In May the House voted to drop the restriction for fiscal 1971, which began on 1 July; but Senator Mike Mansfield and others were hoping to restore it to this year's defense appropriation. Also, the Defense Department has been going beyond the letter of the law and using the section 203 test to stop some research projects supported with funds carried over from fiscal years prior to 1970.

In a 24 April report, the House Armed Services Committee noted about section 203: "This seemingly innocuous provision now appears to be fraught with danger, for it adversely affects research efforts involving the security of the nation five to ten years from now. . . . The Committee on Armed Services is acutely aware of the necessity for continued research and development in all aspects of our national defense, directly or indirectly related with a military operation or function."

The Committee was also considering moves to deny defense research support to "colleges and universities where complete academic freedom is not permitted." By "complete academic freedom," the Committee said it meant "the freedom to present both the pros and cons of any issue without disruption by the proponents or opponents." The Defense Department would be required to make a complete accounting "of all research funds granted to colleges or universities where student disruptions have taken place, particularly in those colleges and universities where administrators have condoned, and in some cases approved, heckling, interruptions of lectures, picketing, and other forms of disruption, violent or nonviolent."

Although no dollar totals are available, the Defense Department's broadened interpretation of section 203 has contributed to the cutoff of a substantial number of research projects, including some in physics and astronomy. Illustrative of DOD policy in applying section 203 is a statement furnished to PHYSICS TODAY by Grant L. Hansen, Air Force Assistant Secretary for Research and Development:

"Cuts in Air Force research are result-

ing from budget problems. Our review under Section 203 revealed that the items which might be questioned under 203 had a dollar value far less than the amount by which the budget was being reduced. Therefore, Section 203 was used primarily to establish which programs should be affected in budget reductions. With respect to carried-over prior-year funds, there is also competition for these funds in connection with adjustments to various programs. In man-

aging our research program, we have attempted to be responsive to the intent expressed by Congress rather than just the specific letter of the law. If we feel that a program clearly would not stand the Section 203 test, we would then look critically at whether it should be continued with prior-year funds or whether it should be stopped in order that those funds could be applied to some other program of a more direct and apparent relevance to our Air Force mission."

—JBP

DOT Takes Over Electronic Center; Physics Jobs Cut

The transfer of the NASA Electronic Research Center in Cambridge, Mass. to the US Department of Transportation (DOT), scheduled to occur on 1 July, is being watched carefully. Research budget cuts forced NASA to give up the Center, which will now become the Transportation Systems Center.

Many are watching the switch to see how well large technical centers—and their staff members—can shift their work to follow changing national priorities. For physicists worried about the job situation, this particular example

is discouraging. Of some 250 physicists working on NASA problems at the beginning of this year, only about 90 were expected to stay at the Center and apply their talents to transportation systems.

The transfer of the Center from NASA to DOT was announced by President Nixon last March. Commenting then, Transportation Secretary John A. Volpe noted the central role of electronics in many transportation problems, especially in aviation and aircraft navigation. (The Federal Aviation Agency is part of DOT.) Volpe said that transportation "needs the



NEW TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS CENTER. About 160 physicists lost their jobs when the NASA Electronic Research Center in Cambridge, Mass. was recently transferred to the US Department of Transportation.