## WASHINGTON INS & OUTS

# IONSON AND MENSE LEAVE SDIO

Changes have taken place at ground level in the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization. One of SDIO's original six technical directors, **James A. Ionson,** the astrophysicist who headed the Innovative Science and Technology program, resigned in April to start his own high-technology company, JDC Enterprises, in Columbia, Maryland. And **Allan T. Mense,** who was acting chief scientist after Gerold Yonas left in August 1986 and held the post until O'Dean P. Judd arrived in November 1987 (see PHYSICS TODAY, December 1987, page 59), is now vice president for research at the Florida Institute of Technology in Melbourne, just south of Cape Canaveral.

Ionson, described by both friends and foes as brash and bright, had been directing a research group in theoretical plasma astrophysics at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center outside Washington when SDIO was organized in 1984. He is generally credited with proposing to SDIO's director, Lieutenant General James Abrahamson, that the newly created "Star Wars" project needed a program to crack tough problems that other components of SDI wouldn't touch—from basic research to "brassboarding." Abrahamson liked the idea and put Ionson in charge of such a program.

In establishing SDIO, Congress had not required anything of the sort. Even now, in fact, the IST office is not a line item in the Pentagon budget, but is funded from a 3% "tax" of the total SDI account. IST's budget in fiscal 1988 is $108 million—enough to fund about 550 contracts, about half in universities, for some 2200 scientists, engineers and graduate students.

Among his first public actions, in March 1985 Ionson held a briefing for 240 academics from 124 colleges, universities and engineering schools, handing out a shopping list of research that would be "fully consistent" with the 1972 Antiballistic Missile Treaty. The response to his program, said Ionson later, was "immediate and overwhelming."

Indeed it was, though not quite as he had expected. Within weeks, some 2300 US university physicists had signed pledges refusing to accept SDI support or to work on projects funded by the program (PHYSICS TODAY, July 1985, page 55). What's more, Ionson had angered the presidents of Caltech, MIT and Stanford by claiming that the schools were involved in consortiums to carry out major SDI research projects. Not so, argued the presidents—the consortiums consisted of individual researchers on contracts from SDI or contained semiautonomous university centers such as the Jet Propulsion Lab, Lincoln Labs or SRI International. To try to defuse the campus wars, Ionson announced that "any work for SDI performed on a university campus will not be classified and therefore [will] not [be] subject to any controls or restrictive clauses or security classification." That position, he told skeptical news reporters, was supported by the Pentagon. "You do not stimulate innovation behind closed doors," he asserted.

Taking over from Ionson as acting director is his deputy, **Dwight Dustin.** He and Ionson were graduate students together at the University of Michigan. They both earned their PhDs in 1977, Ionson from the University of Maryland and Dustin from the University of Michigan. At the same time that Ionson joined the Goddard Space Flight Center to work in theoretical plasma astrophysics, Dustin became a National Academy of Sciences postdoc at the Naval Research Laboratory, doing research in inertial confinement fusion, x-ray lasers and x-ray spectroscopy. Two years later, Dustin joined Science Applications International while continuing to work at NRL.

Ionson was one of a half-dozen people the White House considered as candidates for the post of President Reagan's science adviser after John P. McTague said he wanted to leave the job of acting adviser in 1986 to accept Ford Motor's offer to become vice president for R&D. Ionson was backed at the time by some six Republican members of Congress, including senior members of the House committees on armed services and science, space and technology. His new company, says Ionson, is basically "a commercial IST." Its mission, he observes, is to market new technologies with commercial promise.

Soon after SDIO was established in 1984, Mense joined as Yonas's deputy. Mense had been a senior scientist working on directed-energy beams and plasma fusion research at McDonnell–Douglas Astronautics in St. Louis. While there he also was adjunct professor of physics at the University of Missouri in St. Louis.

—IRWIN GOODWIN ■

### Accessing AIP's Federal Awareness Service

When the Federal government sneezes, the physics community is apt to catch cold. Consider how physicists have been affected by the belt-tightening research budgets in the National Science Foundation, the Department of Energy and NASA; by legislation dealing with R&D tax credits or regulations about classifiable data; and by amendments to the Freedom of Information Act that enable government laboratories to withhold "commercially valuable scientific and technical information." At times it seems that whenever Washington debates, dithers or decides, there are some physicists who want to know what's happening.

To help meet that need, the American Institute of Physics introduced its Federal Awareness Service on Pi-NET at the start of 1988. The new on-line service provides a wide range of current information coming out of Congress and seven government agencies—namely NSF, DOE, NASA, the Department of Defense, the Department of Education, the National Bureau of Standards and the Environmental Protection Agency. The information is distilled by AIP's Washington office from a commercial database known as LEGI-SLATE, which is operated by *The Washington Post*.

The service includes lists, descriptions and updates of issues the Washington office considers of interest to members of AIP-affiliated societies. These include reports on about 50 bills that are currently wending their way through Congress on such subjects as budget actions, computer information and technology transfer, research and technology, as well as matters concerning education, immigration and the technical work force. While the full text of any bill in the Congressional pipeline is not sent as a routine part of the service, the proposed legislation is available on request from the AIP Washington office. As it is, the service carries a weekly schedule of Congressional hearings and announcements that are printed in the *Federal Register*. In addition, it has recently been expanded to feature news highlights culled from the *National Journal* and *Federal Register*.

Users can access the awareness service on Pi-NET through a personal computer by first making a local telephone call to TELENET, then, on command, entering 516-617 to reach Pi-NET. Listings and menus for the awareness service are designed to be self-explanatory. Users will find on-screen guidance from category to category so that they can easily find bills, announcements, schedules and news items by browsing or by initiating searches through key words.