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POLICY ON SECRECY BAFFLES SCIENTIST

New Federal Directives on
Research Prove Elusive

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WASHINGTON, April 24—

What is the new Federal policy on secrecy in scientific research?

Despite a five-page Executive order dealing with freedom of information that went into effect 10 months ago, the interpretation of the Presidential document's fine print as it pertains to scientific research apparently remains a secret, according to one professor who made a persistent effort to find out.

Dr. Earl Callen, a professor of physics at American University, told the American Physical Society here today that for two months he had tried to locate one Federal official who could outline the Government's policy to the society's spring meeting being held in the Shoreham Hotel.

He said that repeated, but unavailing, contacts had been made with officials of the Department of Defense, the Atomic Energy Commission and the National Security Council, the agency empowered under the Presidential directive to "monitor the implementation of this order."

Phone Calls In Vain

"I spent days and even weeks on the phone before this meeting trying to find just one official who could tell us what the new changes in the Freedom of Information Act were all about," Dr. Callen said in an interview.

The result was a formal discussion of Federal secrecy in science with three speakers complaining about certain aspects of the new directive and only an empty chair representing the Government position.

Since Executive Order 11652, "Classification and Declassification of National Security Information and Material," was issued last year there have been frequent complaints in the scientific community, the news media and Congress that it is hardly less restrictive than the Executive order that it supplanted.

The new directive is intended, with certain exceptions, to limit the classifications of Federal documents with stamps of "confidential," "secret" and "top secret," and speed up the declassification and downgrading of documents previously put in these categories.

Dr. Callen said that, since much of such classification was conducted by the Department of Defense, he had telephoned the department's top official on the matter, Joseph J. Liebling, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Security Policy.

Dr. Callen said: "I called in mid-February. Mr. Liebling at first accepted, saying he had outlined the new policy in speeches to other groups. But he said that he had to obtain permission."

Then Mr. Liebling, according to the professor, "called back in a few days to tell me that permission had been denied."

Dr. Callen said that Mr. Liebling had cited two possible reasons: "We have a new Secretary [Elliot L. Richardson] who may have a new policy, and Congressmen quote from our speeches and use it against us."

"I said: 'Why not—you're the responsible official,'" Dr. Callen said, adding that Mr. Liebling had answered: "Don't ask me."

No Success Elsewhere

The professor said that both he and others setting up the physics meeting had gotten in touch with other defense officials to determine if someone else could present the department's position, and that they had said "go to Liebling." Mr. Liebling could not be reached for comment on Dr. Callen's statements.

Dr. Callen said that he had then tried to recruit an official of the second most important Federal agency conducting scientific research, the Atomic Energy Commission.

He said that he had been told that Charles Marshall, who is in charge of security policy for the A.E.C., would be away from Washington all week. Dr. Callen said that the A.E.C. had then suggested another official, Paul Vanstrum, a vice president of the Union Carbide Corporation, which manages the A.E.C.'s huge complex at Oak Ridge, Tenn.

"Mr. Vanstrum said he was not busy this week, but he flatly refused to come," Dr. Callen said.