

Dismissal of Head Start Aide Scored by Chief of House Panel

By EDWARD C. BURKS

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WASHINGTON, March 26—The sudden dismissal of a top medical consultant for the Head Start program "looks fishy to me," the chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor declared today.

Carl D. Perkins, Democrat of Kentucky, said that he was "shocked" by the "undemocratic" dismissal of Dr. Robert S. Mendelsohn "for exercising his right of free speech."

Dr. Mendelsohn, a 43-year-old pediatrician from Evanston, Ill., was a star witness for Mr. Perkins on Monday as the committee opened hearings on the future of antipoverty programs in an atmosphere of partisan squabbling.

As an expression of his personal views, Dr. Mendelsohn said that Head Start "graduates" lost all their gains from the pre-school program once they entered regular public school.

"Deterioration sets in," he argued, because of faulty "organization" and "philosophy" in the public school system. The Head Start benefits of parental participation and small, carefully administered classes are then destroyed, he said.

"The country and the public schools have failed Head

Start," Dr. Mendelsohn concluded. "The question is how long will our country and our public school system continue to fail to serve the child who has been in Head Start."

Today, Mr. Perkins wondered if the Nixon Administration had given orders or applied pressure to have Dr. Mendelsohn forced out of his \$26,000-a-year post. "Throughout America this incident will look real bad," he said.

Dr. Mendelsohn is not a Government Employee, nor are his superiors who called for his resignation yesterday as a result of his testimony before the committee. The Office of Economic Opportunity, Dr. Mendelsohn and his superiors all denied that the Administration had any role in the dismissal.

From September, 1967, until yesterday, Dr. Mendelsohn was director of the Medical Consultation Service, which is supplied under contract to the Head Start program by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

He had 660 physicians across the country working as consultants with local Head Start projects, and Mr. Perkins is drawing heavily on these men for testimony as "the best experts on Head Start in the whole country."

The academy's executive director, Dr. Robert Frazier, and its president, Dr. Hugh C. Thompson, also testified Monday.

Both, however, disassociated themselves from the "personal views" given at that time by Dr. Mendelsohn.

Yesterday, Dr. Frazier requested Dr. Mendelsohn's resignation. Early today, at 6:30 A.M. Arizona time, Mr. Perkins called Dr. Thompson at his home in Tucson, expressed dismay and said that he hoped for a reconsideration. But Dr. Frazier reported this afternoon that the decision was final.