

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENCE

THE FULL UTILIZATION OF SCIENTIFIC PERSONNEL

WE are repeatedly told that this is a *technical* war, waged primarily with scientific weapons and appliances whose design, construction and use require the cooperation of men specially trained as scientists, engineers or physicians. To put more such men at the disposal of their country, curricula are speeded up. Draft deferments are granted so that students may complete what is regarded as essential training in the basic sciences or special techniques. In all these plans there is evidence that the government and the scientific professions realize the importance of highly trained "fighters" and equally specialized "ground crews" to keep the scientific part of the military machine rolling.

Yet there is a patent failure to enlist the volunteer services of hundreds of young scientists who, as teachers or research workers, at this late date are still not engaged in scientific work that relates to the war. Many continue at peaceful and non-essential research, though impatient for direction into more useful service. If exempt from service in the armed forces because of their positions or sex, they feel themselves useless to the war effort in spite, and in fact almost *because*, of their special training. They are driven to taking appointments as airplane spotters or fire wardens, wholly laudable pursuits for any citizen in wartime but calling for no more specialized scientific background than a strictly military assignment "in the line." This seems to have proven especially true for all scientists whose work lies outside the fields of physics and mathematics. Most biologists and geologists and a large number of chemists are not being fully utilized to date.

Another group, of which several illustrations are known to the writers, that is not being fully utilized is that of the scientists who have retired or are approaching retirement from university activity because of compulsory age limitations. One physicist writes, "I am strong and well and able to work long hours and able to work anywhere. In this emergency when scientific men are needed so badly, I do not feel that I should sit and hold my hands. I do not need a job for the sake of a job, but I do wish to help in work that needs to be done and where it is difficult to find men to do it."

It is entirely understandable that a large nation takes time to get in motion. No one should be blamed for this failure to mobilize immediately and to the full the latent energy, enthusiasm and training of our younger and older scientists. But the need for their

help grows rapidly, and certainly the trained men and women are available.

No coordinating agency has been set up for this purpose. The National Roster of Scientific and Specialized Personnel functions, quite properly, chiefly as a catalogue of available individuals; it does not initiate projects or stimulate the inventive ability of others. Should not the older scientists, now in positions of responsibility and command; the more distinguished members of the American Association for the Advancement of Science; and those engaged in formulating the war plans of the National Academy of Sciences and the O.S.R.D. give careful thought to this problem of mobilization on the scientific front? One helpful approach, readily accessible to the senior scientists, would consist of stimulating the younger workers to exercise their initiative in formulating and participating in suitable wartime research projects. A knowledge of the large number of available persons not now utilized would be necessary for this purpose and the A.A.A.S. might well issue a brief questionnaire through its *Bulletin*.

In a recent report on the state of civilian morale in the combatant nations, some one wisely remarked that morale rose in direct proportion to participation in the struggle. We lower morale among our intellectual workers when we frustrate their wishes and their efforts. But worst of all, we lose services that are now sorely needed. The problem of mobilizing the younger and less well-known group of scientists has scarcely been touched to date. If the war is to be prosecuted with the utmost vigor, this is a personnel problem of outstanding importance to our success in the stern months ahead.

The American Association of Scientific Workers, nationally and through its local branches, is carrying on various activities designed to further the mobilization of scientists.¹ However, from the experience of the New York branch of the association and from the observations of the signers of this report, who are themselves engaged in war research, the full utilization of our country's resources in scientific and technical personnel requires decisive action by our national scientific authorities and by our senior scientists.

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¹ See report in "Biology and Medicine in the War," SCIENCE, 95: 2472, 507-508, May 15, 1942.