

COMMENTS

by Readers

One wishes that every scientist and engineer might read the memorandum which accompanied President Truman's veto of the recent National Science Bill, S.526, and the more recent pamphlet, *Science and public policy*, by John R. Steelman, chairman of the President's Scientific Research Board.

From the first comes an appreciation of the complications that necessarily inhere in attempting, as in S.1850 and again in S.526, to make a single organization responsible at once for the allocation of funds to support pure science and for the direction of military research.

The latter makes it abundantly clear that in the rapid growth of science the politician sees ample justification for giving it his increasingly close attention so that it may be properly assimilated into the national life. Repeatedly the report stresses the concept of planning and guiding research effort so as to coordinate it more closely with the scientific programs of the Federal bureaus and with military research as well as with the industrial needs of the Nation (see, e.g., passages on pp. 5, 6, 9, 26, 31, 34, and 61).

Thus, the combined effect of the veto memorandum and the Steelman report is most revealing.

Doubtless, the President stands on firm ground when he demands executive control of any government agency engaged in military research and development. This alone would have justified his veto, but he implies very pointedly that he vetoed S.526 because it failed to give him the broad control over scientific effort which he believes he should have. This is the minimum political price which must be paid if the foundation is created to discharge the dual purpose.

So why strive longer to domicile an antelope and a bear in the same pen? Why create the national fiction that the interests of pure science require intimate association with military research, or vice versa? I wish to imply nothing for or against the hypothesized need of a central organization for military research and development after the pattern of

OSRD. This may be very desirable; but in proportion as it is desirable, it is certainly undesirable that it be yoked to the most international of all undertakings. To do this seems as confusing an approach to world relationships, scientific and otherwise, as it is an unpromising approach to the problem of supporting science here at home.

Given a clean-cut separation of these two functions that envisages a science foundation whose sole purpose is to allot funds for pure science, this foundation could receive Federal aid though it were quite unattached to the executive arm of the Government. Congress can and does continually appropriate money to organizations over which the President has no control.

Adopting such an arrangement for science, the resulting foundation might have a wholly private status, or it might be quasi-governmental after the pattern of the National Academy of Sciences. Some will recall that the Willis Bill before the 79th Congress proposed this latter arrangement. Its sponsors recognized the basic undesirability of associating military research with the allocation of considerable sums for the support of pure science, and feared also the additional threats to scientific freedom which must lie in any foundation subservient to the executive arm of the Government. But what in the minds of some of us is equally important, an extra-governmental agency closes no door upon whatever personal and corporation giving may again be stimulated, either by modification of income tax credits or otherwise.

We do not, however, regard the road leading to such an agency as strewn with violets. American science is to date inexperienced in the centralized partitioning and distribution of its lifeblood. The veto memorandum, in effect, declares that the problem cannot be solved without the intervention of political personnel and political authority; and though this is, perhaps, its one unhappy note, all must admit that the President's apprehension offers a constructive warning.

He points out that members of the foundation, as envisaged in S.526, would be employees of institutions or organizations eligible for grants, and that out of the resulting conflict of interests and responsibilities, and regardless of their complete integrity, the members might be suspected of favoritism. But the course he proposes of taking control away from the scientific members and giving it to political appointees will be regarded by many as epitomizing the dangers most to be feared. Fortunately, alternatives are at hand.

There is, for example, the representative type of institution, operated within the compass of science itself. After all, broad representation is the traditional American way and protects to a degree which is probably unattainable otherwise.

This solution might be approached through a sort of constitutional convention, whose deliberations so far as American science is concerned would promise to rank in significance with those epochal sessions held in Philadelphia a century and a half ago. The aim of this science convention would be to formulate and agree upon a representative central fiscal agency. This would be embodied in a constitution and a system of elections for officers and members such as to merit the approval of both the scientific fraternity and leaders of public opinion. As to the desired safeguards and flexibility of such an agency, these have been emphasized so often in the course of the debates on science legislation that they need only be summarized in a word or two here. Chiefly, they would insure that the allocations of research money would be widespread geographically, they would insure the recognition of scientific merit and promise wherever these might arise, and they would shoulder few, if any, encumbrances upon the recipient. (ROBERT W. KING, 463 West Street, New York City.)



The present communication deals with almost forgotten material on the dental aspects of prenatal injury. Preparation of a bibliography on the effects of German measles during pregnancy recalled to the writers a concept, commonly taught in dental schools in this country, to the effect that acute infectious diseases in the mother during pregnancy will cause congenital anomalies of