

# Association Affairs

## Questions for the September Conference

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THE officers of the American Association for the Advancement of Science have received a letter, signed by A. J. Carlson, A. C. Ivy, and Ralph A. Rohweder, urging upon the AAAS a reexamination of its policy and its program of activities, so that they may more effectively fit into the present-day situation of science in the United States. The officers of the Association had themselves been considering the same general problem, and, stimulated by the letter referred to, they decided that a study should be made. It is the purpose here to give some background and to pose a few of the relevant questions, so that the membership of the AAAS can participate in the study.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science is now more than one hundred years old. During a large part of its first century its chief function was the holding of yearly meetings at which scientific papers were presented. Until comparatively recent years all major scientific groups were formally represented at these annual meetings. Then, as numbers grew large, one group after another—the chemists, the geologists, the physicists, the mathematicians, and now the biologists—considered it more effective to hold separate meetings for the presentation of technical papers and the transaction of society business.

As the character of the annual meetings of the AAAS began to change, the organization developed other activities. The most important was, and continues to be, a publication program. This program includes a weekly and a monthly journal, which the present administration is seeking to improve to the point where they will reflect not only the broad objectives of the Association, but also the spirit and progress of science with which these objectives must be identified. The publication program also involves the printing and distribution of volumes that report symposia arranged by the AAAS and, in certain cases, by other organizations. These are books of special interest which would be difficult to produce without AAAS help.

In addition to the two main functions of meetings and publication, the AAAS is engaged in a variety of other related activities. It has 223 affiliated and associated societies. With some of these it maintains close relations; with others the connections are somewhat more tenuous. In a variety of ways the AAAS has given service in situations that involve the interests of the various affiliated and associated groups. To aid the state academies of science, the AAAS has organized the academy conference, to consider, at the state level, programs and objectives similar to those that concern the AAAS at the national level. In 1946 the

Association was asked to assume leadership in the formation of an Inter-Society Committee in support of a National Science Foundation. The AAAS also has nominal leadership in the work of the Cooperative Committee on the Teaching of Science and Mathematics.

The AAAS also sponsors the Gordon Research Conferences, which provide specialists in many chemical fields with an opportunity to advance basic and applied research through unrestricted discussion.

The Association encourages research by means of small grants, particularly those administered by the state academies of science, and through awards such as the Thousand Dollar Prize, the Theobald Smith Award, and the AAAS-George Westinghouse Science Writing Award.

The Association has working contacts with a rather wide variety of other organizations such as Unesco, the American Standards Association, and the American Council on Education, through direct representation or through membership on committees. In addition, the officers perform numerous service functions of different types for scientific groups, government agencies, individual scientists, and private institutions.

This brief description of the main activities of the AAAS has been given here as a factual background for a series of questions that the officers think deserve careful study. The central and main question is: In view of the present organization and the needs of science, in what ways can the AAAS best serve the over-all interests of science in the United States and elsewhere?

Is the system of large annual meetings antiquated? What kind, or kinds, of meetings can and should the AAAS hold? Can this great organization act as a synthesizing influence in science? Is this one of its great opportunities? Should the AAAS, as the voice of science, recognize as one of its principal activities (perhaps *the* principal one) the exposition and interpretation of science not only to all scientists, but, even more important, to the general public? If so, how can this be done? What is the most effective relationship between the AAAS, on the one hand, and, on the other, the affiliated and associated societies, individual scientists, the National Research Council, the National Science Foundation, the public at large, and government? How can the AAAS journals be improved? Are there new kinds of activities that the AAAS should undertake?

In September a meeting will be held near New York City that will be attended by the members of the Executive Committee of the AAAS and by approximately ten other men invited as consultants. This meeting will be devoted to a preliminary discussion of the sort of questions just raised. Members of the AAAS who have ideas and suggestions are urged to submit them *before September 12* to Dr. Warren Weaver, Room 5500, 49 W. 49th St., New York City 20.