News of Science

Science and International Relations

The *Saturday Review* reported in its issue of 29 May that the National Academy of Sciences is prodding the present administration to give science a direct and active role in the formulation of U.S. foreign policy. An article by John Lear states that at the recent NAS annual meeting a resolution was adopted supporting the academy president, Detlev Bronk, in his efforts to encourage the appointment of distinguished scientists by the Department of State as "Ambassadors of Knowledge."

During the previous administration, a special science adviser to the Undersecretary of State was designated, and his office was given jurisdiction over ten science attaches who were stationed in five of the capitals of Europe. A program drafted by an academy committee at that time called for eventual expansion of the science attache network to include regional representatives in London, Johannesburg, Rio de Janeiro, Sidney, and perhaps New Delhi and Cairo; other representatives were to be assigned on an individual country basis in Paris, Rome, Berne, Stockholm, Ottawa, Lima, Oslo, the Hague, and Brussels.

The article points out that now "all the Science Attaches have come home, none has been replaced, and the office of Science Advisor is occupied by an economist." Lear then invited readers to "consider the situation in our foreign relations in its full absurdity," and goes on to say:

"Soviet Russia is assigning scientific attaches to its embassies for the first time in its history. In its school at home it is training thousands of its youth in the scientific disciplines with the obvious intent of covering the globe with missionaries of technical know-how in the next generation.

"Britain, Canada, Australia, and India have science attaches in their embassies in Washington, backstopped by another science staff working jointly for the Commonwealth. Sweden stations an official scientist in this country. So do Norway, France, Germany, Austria and Japan. Little nations like Belgium, Holland, Denmark and Israel keep scientific specialists in our capital. Even the so-called backward lands—Egypt, South Africa, Yugoslavia—have scientific observers here. The United States . . . has no science attache anywhere."

In an editor's note, the *Saturday Review* asks:

"If the U.S. Navy can (as it does) keep a science staff of its own in London, and if the Atomic Energy Commission can (as it is beginning to do) plant its agents in U.S. embassies under disguised titles, why cannot the Department of State appoint Science Attaches concerned with the day-to-day effects of new discovery on our power for peace in the world?"

Glacier Campsite

Five scientists are returning this month to their campsite of last summer on a 1300-foot-thick glacier in Greenland, where they spent 2 months gathering geological data and measuring the flow of active glaciers and the formation of crevasses. The project is sponsored by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as part of a study of the polar regions. This year's party will be led by Thomas M. Griffis of the University of Denver.

According to conservative estimates, the massive ice fields are moving about a foot a day; the result is intense crevassing of the glaciers. These cracks in the ice are as deep as 150 feet and range from a few inches to 100 feet in width. They sometimes extend for miles across the ice sheet.

Exactly how the cracks form and grow is not fully understood. Last year, using mountain gear, the expedition members descended into a number of crevasses and planted instruments to record temperature changes and ice movements. This summer they hope to recover these instruments for reading.

The expeditions will be on the ice from about 16 June to 5 Sept. The group flew to Thule Air Force Base in Northern Greenland on 13 June, then traveled overland 20 miles to Camp Tuto, a temporary base camp maintained by the 1st Engineers Arctic Task Force. From Camp Tuto snow weasels will carry the expedition about 13 miles out onto the ice cap.

U.S. Visitors and Soviet Science

The 14 Americans who have been attending a conference in Moscow on the physics of high-energy particles issued a statement that said:

"A source of particular gratification to us has been the observation of a strong interest in pure science on the part of so many Soviet physicists. This has been reflected in our many discussions concerning basic ideas." [We are] "greatly impressed by the broad scope of the Soviet effort . . . and by the high level of both experimental and theoretical physics in the Soviet Union."

A spokesman for the group, Robert R. Wilson of Cornell University, told a news conference that the Soviets "are not just making practical things like missiles and atomic bombs, but have a big program of research." Robert E. Marshak of the University of Rochester commented that it was impossible to say whether the Soviets had swung away from research into the military applications of atomic energy to other fields, since the programs were not mutually exclusive.

Discussing their meetings with the Soviet physicists, Marshak and Wilson said the exchanges showed "no reflection of political ideas." They said: "We speak the same language. Their science shows no influence of Marxist ideology."

They also pointed out that the Soviet Government attracts the country's best minds to the natural science field through the prestige and rewards it offers. "Their scientists are relatively better off than ours," Marshak said.

Gibberellic Acid

Gibberellic acid may sound like gibberish, but it turns out to be an extremely important plant growth substance which before long may take its place beside auxin. Last year P. W. Brian and H. G. Hemming showed that gibberellic acid, which markedly stimulates the elongation of stems and leaves in a number of higher plants, acts more strikingly on slow-growing or dwarf forms of peas, broad beans, and French beans than on normal varieties (*Physiologia Plantarum* Sept. 1955). Recently B. O. Phinney of the University of California at Los Angeles found that when six genetically dwarf strains of maize were supplied with gibberellic acid, four of them responded by making normal growth as long as the compound was supplied, while two mutants remained dwarf, one of them showing only a very slight response. (*Proceedings of the National Academy U.S.A.*, April 1956).

It appears that gibberellic acid might be a normal growth-promoting substance, and that its production may be inter-