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Scotching a Damaging Rumor

In Europe during recent months we heard from several sources of an apparently widely circulating rumor that scientists who accepted invitations to scientific meetings in Russia or its satellites jeopardized their chances of being admitted to the United States to attend scientific meetings here. One, for example, said: "I should like to attend the sessions in Moscow next month, but I'm afraid to because I want to go to the congress on . . . in the United States in 1957."

The Department of State had not announced any such stupid policy. Yet the rumors persisted, and the only document with which they could be countered was a letter from the Department of State saying that athletes who accepted invitations to compete in eastern European countries did not thereby endanger their opportunities to compete in the United States.

Fortunately, the situation has now been clarified. Thomas J. Killian, deputy chief and chief scientist of the Office of Naval Research, wrote to the State Department for clarification. He received this reply:

"Dear Dr. Killian:

"I am sorry that many scientists, both in this country and abroad, believe that their chances of obtaining visas might be compromised if they visited or even applied for permission to visit eastern European countries, as you indicate in your letter of November 19, 1956.

"The Department's policy in this respect has been consistent and of long standing. With regard to visas, an alien must be found eligible in all respects to receive a visa under our immigration laws. Until such time as an alien actually makes application for such a visa, no assurance can be given that a visa will be issued to him.

"A visit to a country in Soviet-dominated territory in itself is no ground for the refusal of a visa or a delay in its issuance unless such a visit is attended by activities which suggest affiliations with, or advocacy of, the Communist program. Repeated visits to such country, however, may raise a question as to the visa applicant's political affiliations.

"With regard to passports for American scientists, to which I presume you refer in your inclusion of scientists 'in this country,' the Department's policy again has been consistent and of long standing. Passport applications from scientists are processed in accordance with the same laws and regulations which apply to all citizens. It is true that passports are not validated for travel to some countries during periods of tension when the ability of this Government to protect its citizens overseas is in doubt.

"The Department does not have a policy against publication of such a letter as this, and you may feel free to publish or otherwise give wide distribution to it, if you so desire. I further suggest that any instances of scientists being informed by State Department officials that their visits to eastern European countries would compromise their visa or passport privileges be reported promptly to this office in order that investigation may be made at once.

Sincerely yours,
Walter M. Rudolph
Assistant to the Science Adviser"

The reply seems to state about as clearly as can be stated the defensible policy that each application for a passport or visa must be examined on its merits and that attending a scientific meeting in eastern Europe neither disqualifies nor endangers a later application to the United States Department of State.—D. W.