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Putting Heads Together

On the basis of a report submitted by his science advisory committee, President Eisenhower is moving to bring together in a new Federal Council for Science and Technology the heads of various Government research and development programs so that they may offer advice about how their separate policies may be more effectively integrated. According to the report, which is excerpted in this issue of *Science* (page 85), one possible item for the council's agenda is the advisability of setting up a Government-supported laboratory for the study of such metals and materials as might be required by advanced forms of rocketry. Another possible item on the agenda is the advisability of increasing Government support for basic research by building expensive pieces of equipment such as particle accelerators.

Almost everyone seems agreed that some mechanism is required for overseeing the total federal effort in science besides the review afforded by the Bureau of the Budget. The future course of this particular mechanism, however, will depend on several elements.

Initial membership on the Federal Council for Science and Technology, as proposed in the report, will be given to the eight federal agencies that together administer over 95 percent of Government research and development. The agencies that are primarily scientific—the Atomic Energy Commission, the National Science Foundation, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration—will be represented by the agency heads. The agencies with diverse research and development activities—the Departments of Defense, Interior, Commerce, Agriculture, and Health, Education, and Welfare—will be represented by, so to speak, vice presidents in charge of research. To date, only the Department of Defense has such an officer, in the person of its director of Defense Research and Engineering.

The interested parties will all be represented on the council, but in a bureaucratic committee, especially at this high a level, certain factors may operate against the group's effectiveness. For one thing, a group of people each of whom is himself vulnerable to loss is unlikely to produce a variety of new ideas. For another, people caught up in matters of day-to-day urgency are unlikely to give sustained attention to matters of long-range concern. A third reason is that a committee with the power only to advise may find itself without an audience. But there are also factors that may make for success, and these hinge in good measure on whether the committee has as its chairman a man who is able to force issues, who is able to acquire a staff competent to consider long-range questions, and who is able to get the people who have the power to act to listen to him.

If Charles E. Wilson is an example of the man with access to the President who never learned that what is good for science is good for the country, then James R. Killian is an example of the man who is able to get top-level scientific opinion to top-level policy makers. Since the report calls for the President's science adviser to be the chairman of the new council, and since that person is Killian, there is every expectation that the council's recommendations will be vigorous and that they will be followed.

Although the future course of the Federal Council for Science and Technology will depend upon the council's effectiveness, it will also depend upon events outside the council's scope. In particular, the future course will depend on whether the push towards closer cooperation among the Government's scientific agencies stops with the council or moves on to the establishment of a Department of Science. A Department of Science may be regarded with enthusiasm or dismay, but it is something that we are all going to hear a lot about in the next six months.—J.T.