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Who Calls the Tune?

One of the most effective ways for scientists to exchange information and keep abreast of new developments is by way of scientific meetings. International scientific meetings are of especial importance and pose peculiar difficulties because of national policies that interfere with the free movement of scientists from one country to another. Foreign scientists sometimes have trouble getting visas to come to this country, and sometimes they find it impossible. This is one problem, but it is not the only one. Some of our scientists—government scientists—find themselves subject to a special ruling that limits their freedom to attend meetings abroad. This special limitation applies to international meetings that will be attended by scientists from countries not recognized diplomatically by the United States. Before a government scientist can attend such a meeting as a participant or at government expense, the State Department must be satisfied that no scientist from any nonrecognized country will be present. If any scientist from a nonrecognized country plans to attend the meeting, then our government scientists may not go unless they pay their own way. Even if they do pay their own way they may not deliver a paper at the meeting.

The State Department justification for the policy is this: if scientists employed by the government should attend meetings along with scientists from, for example, East Germany or Communist China, our policy of nonrecognition would be weakened. The supporting argument is that nonrecognized countries would make the propaganda claim that our scientists are government officials and that consequently their attendance at meetings with representatives from these countries constitutes *de facto* recognition.

Whatever the merit of the diplomatic issue, it ought to be weighed against the losses that the ruling entails. It is not the individual government scientist alone who loses; the agency that assigns him to attend the meeting is acting in the national interest, and that also suffers. Do we stand to lose more than we gain by our policy? In one way we clearly do. By the simple expedient of sending a representative to a meeting, a nonrecognized country can block the attendance of our government scientists. We thus allow our participation to be governed by these countries rather than by our own national interest.

Another objection to the argument in support of the policy is that even though the scientists in question do work for our government, they do not represent us diplomatically. Thus the presence of government scientists at a meeting of the kind being discussed cannot reasonably be construed—despite the State Department's apprehensions—as a step toward recognition. The International Council of Scientific Unions in 1958 passed a resolution affirming the right of scientists to participate in international scientific activity "without regard to race, religion, or political philosophy" and added that such participation "has no implications with respect to recognition of the government of the country or territory concerned." In April 1960 the Governing Board of the National Academy of Sciences–National Research Council endorsed that resolution.

The next step is up to the State Department—G.DuS.