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A Small Note of Cheer

In this space (30 September 1960) we joined others in criticizing the State Department policy that prevented the attendance of government scientists at international meetings attended by scientists from nonrecognized regimes. The Department justified its stand by the argument that nonrecognized countries would claim that the presence of U.S. Government employees at such meetings would constitute *de facto* recognition. It is gratifying to note that this policy has been modified—at least for the specific case of the Fifth International Biochemistry Congress, to be held in Moscow next August.

The new ruling is summarized in a letter that Walter G. Whitman, Science Adviser to the Secretary of State, wrote us on 19 December. The pertinent parts of this letter are as follows:

"You may be interested to know that the State Department has recently indicated to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare that it has no objection to that Department's plans for the participation of its scientists in the Biochemistry Congress. This is in accord with the Department's policy of not hindering the participation of Government employees in international scientific meetings if membership and participation are not based upon political considerations and such attendance is in the national interest.

"The Department does not usually accredit an *official* United States Government Delegation to take part in international conferences at which the attendance of nationals of unrecognized regimes is expected. This does not, however, preclude Government employees from taking part in nongovernmental meetings at government expense without accreditation if the Department of State determines that their participation is in the national interest. Without accreditation, a participant does not represent nor speak for his government."

What the State Department is saying in effect is that scientists do not represent our government officially unless the Department says they do. The device used is accreditation, which makes a distinction between a scientist as a governmental representative and a scientist as a scientist.

The change in policy, although it is a step in the right direction, still leaves some problems about international scientific meetings unsolved. If it is good for government scientists to go abroad to find out what foreign scientists are doing, it is also good for scientists of all political complexions to come to international meetings in the United States. Such meetings facilitate the exchange of information not only for government scientists but for all scientists. The difficulty here lies in the cumbersome handling of visas for foreign nationals, in the refusal on political grounds to grant visas to some scientists from recognized countries, and in the lack of a clear-cut formula for dealing with scientists from nonrecognized countries. Perhaps the Department could rule that foreign scientists who are permitted to attend meetings in the United States are accredited not as officials of their countries but solely as scientists.

Complex though the issue is, the holding of international scientific meetings in the United States is clearly in the national interest. The State Department should find a way to encourage such meetings without jeopardizing the policy of nonrecognition. That it has found such a formula for our own scientists encourages us to hope that it can find one for those of other countries.—G.DuS.