

News and Comment

Population Planning: Missions Told That U.S. Is Now Receptive To Requests for Some Assistance

The Agency for International Development (AID) has quietly advised its foreign missions that the U.S. Government is now receptive to requests for certain types of assistance in population planning. The advice is contained in a cautiously worded memo, which, while not going beyond earlier official statements, makes it clear that U.S. policy and public opinion in this sensitive area have undergone a significant transformation.

AID, which is now engaged in its annual appropriations struggle with Congress, is reluctant to risk opening a second front by publicly stepping into the birth control controversy; nevertheless, it has told its personnel abroad that population planning is now officially acceptable to the United States, and that requests for assistance should be forwarded to Washington. As a hedge against anti-birth control forces, however, AID is emphasizing that its interest is limited to research, training, and the promotion of economic and demographic studies, goals which are jointly shared by Planned Parenthood and the Catholic Church. It points out, though, that "there are private institutions, which, often with financial support from foundations, are doing significant work in this field; they are likewise potential sources of information and assistance."

The memo, dated 11 May and signed by Secretary of State Dean Rusk, states that the "problem [has] entered the focus of public attention" since the United States last December supported a resolution to provide birth control assistance through the U.N. (The resolution was eventually adopted in a watered-down form, with the assistance provision deleted, but even that version was regarded as a sizable step toward giving official recognition to the population problem.)

As a result of various official statements and public discussion, Rusk continued, "it is therefore advisable, at this stage . . . [to] furnish the missions with the following additional information regarding the U.S. position."

The U.S., he pointed out, has associated itself with, or undertaken, a series of steps aimed at identifying population problems, arousing public interest in them, and promoting research on fertility.

"AID recognizes that increases or decreases of population, changes in geographic or age distribution, and other aspects of the population problem affect directly economic and social development, and the plans and prospects of aid-receiving countries. AID is therefore willing to consider requests for assistance in the form of (1) support to research activities and to the building of research institutions in the developing countries themselves which deal with statistics, demography, social science, the relationship between population trends and national development; and (2) technical assistance which aids developing countries in preparing, executing and analyzing population censuses, and in utilizing demographic data and analyses in social and economic planning, through training of experts and technicians from the developing countries, or by making advisers available.

"With regard to the sociobiological aspects of the problem," Rusk continued, "the President dealt with them" when he told a press conference, on 24 April, that he favored an expansion of fertility research. (Kennedy, however, sidestepped a question on whether he favored direct birth control assistance to underdeveloped nations.)

"AID," Rusk went on, "has no specialized professional competence in this area." Therefore, requests for assistance will be forwarded from AID's offices abroad to the U.S. Public Health Service.

What happens then isn't clear, since the Public Health Service does not

claim to have any setup for responding to such requests, nor does AID say that any requests have yet been forthcoming from underdeveloped nations. Nevertheless, the situation is altogether remote from that which prevailed under Eisenhower.

It was he who told a press conference that family planning is none of the government's business; officials of his administration then obliterated the subject from public statements, and it could safely be said, under Eisenhower, that the U.S. government had nothing to do with birth control. A long road remains to be traveled between the present acknowledgment of the problem and steps to deal with it, but when the events of the past 2 years are viewed against the long tradition of governmental indifference, it appears that the movement for family planning has scored an impressive breakthrough.—D. S. GREENBERG

Scientists on Survival: Second Annual Meeting Quiet, Fruitful in Contrast to Earlier Affair

New York, N.Y. Scientists on Survival (SOS) held its second annual congress here last week, and it turned out to be a highly professional, sedate affair, in contrast to the rambunctious 1962 session that almost made SOS's first annual congress its last (*Science*, 22 June 1962).

The pitfall of the first congress was that it couldn't decide whether it was a political-action organization or a gathering of scientists devoted to bringing their professional abilities to bear on the problems of peace and disarmament. The two are not necessarily incompatible, but many of those who attended felt that research and thought should precede resolution writing, and they rebelled against efforts to wring far-reaching pronouncements on national policy from 2½ days of deliberations. A great deal of dissatisfaction, at least among the scientists, also arose from the failure to distinguish between the professionals in attendance and ordinary citizens who qualified for participating as a "scientist on survival" simply by paying a small registration fee. As a result, the first congress ended in bedlam, with several elder statesmen of science demonstrating that they could hold their own in a shouting match across a crowded hall.

This year it was altogether different, and, while SOS will have to resolve a