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The American Association for the Advancement of Science was founded in 1848 and incorporated in 1874. Its objects are to further the work of scientists, to facilitate cooperation among them, to improve the effectiveness of science in the promotion of human welfare, and to increase public understanding and appreciation of the importance and promise of the methods of science in human progress.

New Goals for Science in Britain

During the past seven years I have visited London five times. On the first four occasions I came away depressed. I felt there was a refusal to face reality and a worship of tradition that could lead only to further decay. On a recent visit I found a completely different atmosphere, a sense of urgency almost like that of wartime. In talking with a score of scientists, journalists, and politicians I found them unanimous in desiring change and in feeling that science and technology are Britain's hope for the future. Both major political parties have, to differing degrees, adopted this view, and science is to be one of the major issues of the forthcoming General Election.

Mr. Harold Wilson, leader of the Labour Party, expressed some of his views on science in Parliament last November 19:

... whatever differences there may be in priorities, there should be no differences about objectives, the vital need to mobilise the talents of this nation, its skill and science, its ingenuity and its power of innovation, not only to enhance our economic strength, but to strengthen the voice of this country in the world. . . . We live, or we perish, on our skill and our science. This means, quite simply, that we have to have more trained people and that we have to use them more efficiently.

Mr. Wilson pointed out four problems: "the training of scientists, holding them in this country, using them more intelligently, and ensuring a greater success in applying the results of scientific research to industry."

In the matter of training more scientists, the two political parties are not far apart. The government initiated in 1961 a study of needs in higher education. This study was conducted by a committee headed by Lord Robbins. Some of the resultant drastic recommendations already have been implemented.

The second need mentioned by Mr. Wilson—holding scientists in Britain—has provided the Labour Party with what may be its most politically potent slogan, "The Brain Drain" (see "News and Comment," 21 February). Each occasion on which a scientist emigrates from Britain is headline news. The flow is continuing, and the Government is destined to experience an additional series of blows between now and the election. Even then, the problem seems unlikely to disappear.

Mr. Wilson's third point—using scientists more intelligently—involves another hard problem. The expression "using" scientists is not felicitous and does not take into account the free spirit essential to the creative process. If government is to support science on a large scale, scientists must be responsive to the needs of society, but the terms under which the response is elicited must be carefully delineated.

Mr. Wilson's fourth point—ensuring greater success in applying the results of research—requires a change in national attitudes. British contributions in fundamental research are unsurpassed, particularly when viewed on a population basis. To a substantial degree this success is due to emphasis on values of scholarship. The reverse side of the coin, however, has been a downgrading in the status of those who apply the results of research. In some circles engineers are regarded as being not much above common laborers.

The British have entered on an important new phase in their history. They face difficult problems in their determination to use science and technology to achieve national goals. When aroused, they have tremendous capacities. Their performance at this time will be worth watching.—P.H.A.