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A New Level of Understanding

The congressional year just concluded has been a period of unusual interest for scientists, politicians, political scientists, and others who are concerned with the relations of science and government. Some new ground has been broken and some past relationships extended through omnibus legislation on higher education and an enhanced role for the U.S. Office of Education; by legislation on medical education and service, drug controls, industrial research, and air and water pollution; through some reorganization of federal scientific bureaus; and by the establishment of the National Arts and Humanities Foundation.

The year has also seen the National Academy of Sciences become a formal adviser to Congress, while continuing in its long-established role of adviser to the Executive Branch. The extensive reports of the Elliott Committee were published, and the Daddario Committee held the first major review of National Science Foundation legislation, activities, and future responsibilities since the Foundation came into being. Although a proposal to establish a commission to study the desirability of a federal department of science and technology was shelved, as it has been in several earlier sessions, there was plenty of evidence that Congress is seeking a better understanding of the relations between science and the agencies of government and between scientists and the other segments of our society.

Although the problems that have been dealt with through legislation or discussed in hearings and reports have been handled individually and empirically, each in terms of its own characteristics and requirements, the very amount of such segmental activity has increased the need for a more generalized, more theoretical, treatment of the relation of science to government. Wallace Sayre in last week's issue of *Science* (page 595) reviewed a first answer to this need: Don K. Price's *The Scientific Estate*. Most past discussions of the relations between scientists and government have dealt with such topics as the conflict of interest of members of advisory bodies, the distribution of research funds, the proper growth rate for basic research, the relative advantages of alternative methods of support, the allocation of patents and copyrights, and various forms of organization of government bureaus. Price discusses something much more fundamental, "the problem of the relation of science and scientists to the political ideas and constitutional system of the United States."

The political theorists who wrote the U.S. Constitution sought to protect a democratic government and society against the then major sources of power: property, the military, and the church. Since that time, science and technology have become important sources of power. How would the Founding Fathers have handled this problem? It is at this general and fundamental level that Price considers the relations between scientists and government and the problem of keeping the growing influence of science compatible with representative government.

Detailed questions will continue to be treated, as they must be at least in part, at their own level and in their own pragmatic terms. Nevertheless, they can now be considered in a deeper perspective as a result of Price's analysis, and that analysis can be a starting point for a more rational and more unified treatment of a diversity of problems. Sayre concludes his review with the statement that the book's "excellence as a venture in theory stands as a strong invitation to an empirical testing of its wide-ranging conclusions." *The Scientific Estate* has moved the discussion of the relation of science and government to a new level of understanding.—DAEL WOLFLE