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Science Policy Confrontation

On 11 and 12 January, at the Paris headquarters of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the science policies of the United States were critically examined by the 20 other OECD countries. OECD science policy reviews have two purposes: to help the country being reviewed assess its own policies and to build up a useful body of knowledge concerning science policy for its member countries.

In preparation for the January confrontation, U.S. officials had to examine our own science policies and help the OECD secretariat prepare a descriptive account. Four external examiners then visited this country and prepared reports of their findings (*Science*, 12 January).

At the culminating confrontation, a team of American experts (Donald Hornig, Ivan Bennett, William Carey, Philip Handler, Congressman George Miller, Herman Pollack, and James A. Shannon) explained and defended American policies and discussed 20 issues on which they were quizzed by the four external examiners (H. G. B. Casimir, director of the Philips Research Laboratories; Théo Lefèvre, former Prime Minister of Belgium; Pierre Masse, chairman of the board of Electricité de France; and C. H. Waddington, professor in the Institute of Animal Genetics, Edinburgh) and other representatives of the OECD countries.

From the review the U.S. has gained the benefit of an objective and candid analysis of how its science policies look to a group of knowledgeable foreign critics. Much of what they had to say was complimentary. Some of it was envious. And some was fairly sharply critical. Disagreements, among the reviewers or between the reviewers and the U.S. representatives, provided points for fruitful discussion at the confrontation.

The role of science in governmental and economic affairs is basically much the same in all developed countries, but the forms of government of these countries differ and so do the details and the manner of development of their science policies. Much of the January discussion took shape from the fact that Europeans often do not appreciate the diversification of responsibility that exists in the U.S. and do not fully understand how Congress differs from the parliaments with which they are more familiar. Fellow delegates especially praised Congressman Miller's explanations of the way Congress works, and comments following the confrontation indicated that the American delegation had explained U.S. policies effectively and had cleared away some of the confusion and misinterpretation concerning these policies. *Le Figaro*, for example, quoted M. Lefèvre as saying that the American policies were an example to Europe and not a threat (as was implied in the written report) unless Europe chose not to understand their meaning.

When OECD was still the Organization for European Economic Cooperation it used the confrontation technique as a powerful instrument for securing cooperation in the use of Marshall Plan funds in the postwar restoration of the European economy. The technique has since been used to exchange information and criticisms concerning policies and practices in scientific and technical education. The January confrontation was the eighth in a series of science policy reviews. It provided an influential group of policy makers with an intensive seminar on U.S. policies and on their interpretation by different examiners. The published records will be available to a wider audience. The policy reviews are one of the means OECD is using to help member countries understand each other and their interrelationships more clearly.

—DAEL WOLFLE