

Briefing

Year of the Dove?

A great wall of silence has generally blocked American scientists' attempts to communicate with scientists and their organizations in mainland China. But the visit to Peking by U.S. table tennis players and newsmen has boosted the hopes of many scientists here that there may be some replies in the mail soon.

Informal talks are now under way concerning Chinese participation at the National Accelerator Laboratory in Batavia, Ill., an installation with many foreign scientists on the premises. Such a move would have "no trouble" in gaining State Department approval, said Herman Pollack, head of State's division of international and technological affairs.

Also in the flush of optimism following the ping pong ploy, the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) is pledging to renew its efforts to establish a scientific exchange with the mainland Chinese. W. Murray Todd, executive secretary of the office of the Foreign Secretary told *Science* that the Academy is willing to "send people wherever they will meet," and that the NAS is sufficiently representative of the nongovernmental community of scholars, physical scientists, and engineers to be a device for Sino-American contact. In May 1966 under the late Alan T. Waterman, NAS formed with two other groups a Committee on Scholarly Communication with Mainland China. But the timing was unfortunate. Barely 2 months later the "Cultural Revolution" hit and caused the blackout of communication with the West which persists even now.

Scientists in the United States are optimistic now because, traditionally, scientific exchanges have been among the first signs of a thaw in international relations.

Scientific exchange with mainland China appears to have solid backing in the Nixon Administration. On 26 January 1971, Secretary of State William P. Rogers stated in congressional testimony that "it is the general policy of this administration to permit the exchange of unclassified scientific and technical information with the scientists and institutions of any country, re-

gardless of the state of our diplomatic relations with that country"—which is widely interpreted to have been a reference to mainland China.

Despite China's general, official silence since the Cultural Revolution, some personal mail has gotten in and out. Organizations now either write directly to individuals in China or contact persons in any of the 48 countries which now recognize the Peking government.

Significant among attempts at contact are the efforts of some leaders of the Pugwash conference to include the Chinese in this summer's conference in Sinaia, Rumania—a country which recognizes mainland China. The Chinese attended Pugwash from 1957 through the 1960 meeting in Moscow. Other groups attempting contact will be aided by the publication this summer of a directory of 490 Chinese scientific institutions. Items will include biographies, research topics, facilities, and locations. The directory is current through early 1967. It is published by the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace at Stanford and was researched under a contract with the National Science Foundation.

But China herself may not yet be ready for scientific relations abroad. Leo A. Orleans, a veteran China watcher for the Library of Congress, points out that the Chinese ceased publishing hundreds of their scientific journals in 1966 and haven't resumed. He concludes that, instead, Chinese scientists transmit research information via the centralized bureaucracy. Nonetheless, he thinks it likely that publication will resume gradually. But China has yet to give any hint of a scientific open door.—D.S.

Manpower Maneuvers

Action on national health insurance may prove to be the main event for the 92nd Congress but an important preliminary bout is now in progress over health manpower legislation. And an early flurry was caused by an Administration proposal for a new form of federal support of medical schools.

The financial plight of the medical schools seems to have forced a consensus on the need to modify the present patchwork pattern of federal aid

to medical schools through separate programs for support of research, construction, student aid and of innovation and enrollment expansion.

The watchword now is "institutional support," but the Administration created some consternation in the medical schools early this year when it appeared to be giving serious consideration to a proposal to provide institutional support on the basis of what, in effect, would be contracts negotiated with each school to cover the costs of what the government asks it to do. Such negotiations would obviously give the government more leverage in encouraging innovation or increases in enrollment.

The reaction of the medical schools and their national organization, the Association of American Medical Colleges, was generally negative. They argued that what is needed is a floor of operating support to preserve the schools from budgetary disaster. To accomplish this they favor a shift to a "capitation" system which would provide funds on a per-student basis. The capitation formula seems likely to carry the day, since the three health manpower bills now regarded as major contenders in Congress, including a bill backed by the Administration, all include capitation grants. Chances that a new health manpower measure will be passed this session are regarded as good since the present Health Professions Assistance Act expires at the end of June. Hearings on health manpower legislation are now in progress in the House. Senator Edward M. Kennedy, who heads the Senate health subcommittee, says he plans early hearings but has not scheduled them.

Health, Education, and Welfare Secretary Elliot L. Richardson appears to have backed away from the package-deal concept of medical school funding for the present, but not given up the idea. Any major health insurance program would have a multiplier effect on the physician shortage. In the face of this onslaught on services, Administration planners are reluctant to see capitation become the determining principle in federal support of medical schools, since they feel pressure for escalation of capitation levels would lessen the planners' clout in encouraging innovation and reform. So the last has probably not been heard from those in favor of negotiating change.—J.W.