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AAAS Council Resolutions

The American Association for the Advancement of Science has had a liberal policy with regard to the introduction of resolutions for endorsement by Council. This has stimulated new thinking and has provided a means for assuring relevance and responsiveness during this period of transition for science and technology. It is important to assure that this responsiveness is accompanied by appropriate responsibility.

The Committee on Council Affairs, of which I am a member, has the responsibility of studying the resolutions and recommending Council action. Many types of resolutions have been sent to this committee. When resolutions are clearly inappropriate, time is lost by the committee in discussing them and time has obviously been spent by the sponsor in preparing them. It seems in order to indicate the nature of resolutions that are appropriate and the nature of those that are not.

One of the objects of the Association stated in its constitution is "to improve the effectiveness of science in the promotion of human welfare." All too often the words "human welfare" have been taken as the sole basis for a resolution; the "effectiveness of science" or, indeed, any relationship to science has either been ignored or been introduced under very weak rationalization.

Frequently, these resolutions have strongly suggested an attempt to use the name of the Association to support political convictions held by the sponsor. The Committee on Council Affairs does not consider that the Association's purposes include publicizing the political views of its members.

On many occasions, the forms of the resolutions have also been inappropriate for support by a body of scientists supposedly acting on scientific evidence. This has been particularly noticeable in the "whereases" preceding the resolution, which have sometimes been inaccurate in content and ridiculous in length. For example, one resolution submitted in 1970 stated: "Whereas this opinion is shared by leading scientists throughout the world. . . ." Under questioning, the author was unable to name any "leading scientists" who shared the opinion and finally said he "thought" that "some" foreign scientists would agree. This sort of loose and careless language does not impress the committee and raises doubts as to the intellectual honesty of the sponsor of the resolution.

The use of words such as "conclusive proof," without any evidence as to the nature of the proof or where it is to be found, does not help the committee to gauge the soundness of a resolution. Whenever resolutions require specialized knowledge for their consideration, their movers should make it their responsibility to provide such knowledge, so that the committee and the Council can act appropriately. Motions for action requiring financial backing by the Association should include realistic budget estimates. Explicit instructions for submission of resolutions will be published annually in the September issue of the *AAAS Bulletin*.

The time may well come when scientists will need to speak out together on matters of concern to us all. The authority of our Association will have been greatly weakened if we have passed resolutions on matters unrelated to science or have forced through Council resolutions on which scientists hold widely divergent views.—FRANK BRADSHAW WOOD, *Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Florida, Gainesville 32601*