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Global Science Policy

To suggest that world wisdom be incorporated into decisions about the directions and the uses of science and technology is like proposing that our modern gods be installed on Mount Olympus, with no assurance that they would better handle Prometheus or Pandora. Our predicament as mortals, however, compels the question of whether a global science policy—inside, outside, or in conjunction with the United Nations—is desirable, possible, or practical.

The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions has broached the subject in a seminar reconnoitering the salient problems and pathways and looking for a detour around the roadblocks of national sovereignty, as exercised by 135 member states of the United Nations.

The seminar followed a report (U.N. E/5238 Add. 1) prepared for the secretary general of the United Nations on the role of science and technology in development during the past 27 years. That report on international cooperation in the handling of threats and opportunities created by science revealed, with encouraging exceptions, regrettable shortcomings. The one coherent institution we have—the United Nations—has never been given, nor has its specialized agencies been given, adequate money, high-caliber personnel, facilities, or authority. In the wake of each climacteric development, it has had to improvise and prompt from the wings. The present structure of the United Nations does not provide a nodal point for determining policy, either in terms of science and technology for development or for the development of science. The preoccupation has been with less developed countries, which at the moment are increasingly disenchanted by the nature of that aid because, having no scientific infrastructure, they could not properly evaluate the choices they were constrained to make. How they are going to be helped by shopping in what Lord Blackett called "the supermarket of science" needs rethinking. The advanced countries might wisely reflect in their national science policies a proper concern for the specific needs of those countries lacking scientific education or research facilities.

Whether a "global science policy" could ever be merely the sum of national science policies is questionable. "Global" is a carry-all word. It might imply "intergovernmental," but it also means developments in science that affect the whole of mankind and its living space and that are beyond the competence of a nation or nations, no matter how advanced. It also includes the "commonwealth of science"—the academies, the professional societies, and the movements like Pugwash, which are transnational instruments. That was why the rubric of the seminar was "inside, outside, or in conjunction with the United Nations." The term "science policy" raised questions of constraints on or control of science and technology. No one suggested that there could or should be a moratorium on scientific research, but a case can be made for establishing wise priorities in the technological use of scientific knowledge and, indeed, for offering caveats on trends in science that are raising profound ethical questions.

One structural proposal was that the now redundant Trusteeship Council be replaced by a Scientific Council on the level of the Security and Economic and Social Councils so that the issues would be aired and continually reviewed. At least the world ought to know what is going on.—The Right Honourable LORD RITCHIE-CALDER, *Senior Fellow, Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Box 4068, Santa Barbara, California 93103*