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The Denver Meeting: Afterthoughts

With the Proceedings Issue of *Science*, the recent Annual Meeting in Denver belongs to the history of the AAAS. At all such meetings, the symposium arrangers and participants, together with the local hosts, control the indices of satisfaction. Judging from the feedback, the Denver meeting seems to have been a thoroughly enjoyable affair, touched in no small degree by the warmth and friendliness of the community. To Maurice Mitchell and John McKinney, who chaired the local committee, and to their volunteer associates the AAAS owes much. As for the symposium arrangers and panelists, on whom the substantive burden of the meeting fell, any expression of thanks falls short of adequacy.

The predicament of Arthur Herschman, who must plan each annual meeting, is awesome. He must make hard choices if the meeting is to be representative of the range and diversity of contemporary science and technology, reflect a sensible balance of subjects and treatment, and convince members that they should attend. Somehow, justice is done and not too many friends alienated, and the suspicion here is that Herschman has found a way to clone Monte Carlo methods with psychology.

The function of an annual meeting is not to be taken for granted. In the case of the AAAS meeting, it has evolved as a process of interdisciplinary communication in science and technology and an instrument for public understanding. But this focus on the horizontal axis can be carried too far, at the expense of straightforward discussion of main directions in scientific discovery. In future meetings, this degree of tilt will be more carefully calibrated.

What might have been just a pleasant and useful week in Denver turned into something else at the midweek meeting of the AAAS Council. A classic AAAS family fight erupted when it was discovered that a controversial psychologist had been recommended for election as a Fellow. What needs to be said, and said firmly, is that scientific disputes are best handled through remedies that exist within the appropriate professional society, rather than by turning the AAAS Council into an inept jury. It must be added that the vote to accept one controversial scientist as a Fellow in no way places the imprimatur of the AAAS on theories that many members find unacceptable. Until now, the AAAS has had room for every shade and hue of opinion and has not presumed to judge who is right or wrong. It should beware of moral judgments taken when tempers are hot: they are a smoking gun that science does not need.

Aside from this, the Denver meeting met all expectations. More than 4000 attended, not counting throngs of Colorado citizens who came to the public lectures. Once again, good preparatory work enabled many physically handicapped scientists to participate—a marked change for the better. Women scientists and other minorities including Native Americans left their mark on the meeting. Foreign scientists, young and old, contributed to the proceedings generously, and prominent members of the house of science found time to rap with high school students. The Southwestern and Rocky Mountain Division added a fresh element to the meeting by sponsoring contributed papers and poster sessions.

Time passes. This was the 143rd national meeting of the AAAS, and what we saw was good. Now the work begins so that when we meet in Washington, D.C., the tools of science and technology will fit the work of the nation. By this time next year the Carter Administration will be more of a known quantity and its approaches to national and international initiatives in science, technology, and human affairs should provide a bearing on future trends and issues. If the Denver meeting shed light on "Science and Change: Hopes and Dilemmas," the Washington meeting can be a catalyst for decisions.

—WILLIAM D. CAREY