28 September 1979, Volume 205, Number 4413 **SCIENCE**

Science and the Politics of Development

Those who kept an eye on the recent United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development had a glimpse of what it means to mix science and technology with contemporary diplomacy. There can be no further doubt that science and technology are high cards in the new international political economy. If the Vienna meeting accomplished little else, it dramatized the North-South gap by pounding home the fact that three-fourths of the world's people account for only 3 percent of the world's research and development.

Although the Vienna meeting with its thousands of participants did not display the exquisite diplomatic theatre that scientists thought they might find in the city of Metternich, it mirrored powerfully the rising turmoil in the relationships between the struggling human majority and the preoccupied minority. The message from the developing nations was explicit: that they will no longer accept the trickle-down method of scientific and technological transfer that suits the advanced countries, and that access to both theoretical and practical knowledge looms large in their formulation of the new international economic order.

While the developing nations were cheerfully thrashing the advanced societies for allegedly hogging scientific and technological capacity and conspiring to create the brain drain, they also bracketed the superpowers—capitalist and socialist alike—as equally to blame for diverting scientific and technical expertise into a mindless arms race. It was an indictment with telling effect. As almost nothing else could, it etched the contradictions in the main trends of current history: surging self-consciousness on the part of the emerging majority, contrasted with a rush to the edge of night by the superpowers. The limits of knowledge in managing peaceful change have seldom seemed so clear.

The fruits of the Vienna conference, by most standards, were indeed modest: A sort of promise of future increased funding for science and technology for development, but hardly a guarantee; a new intergovernmental committee to add to the existing regiments of the United Nations, but with a stronger voice for the Third World; new plans for international information networks of science and technology; and a promised search for an assured system for financing the transition of the developing countries to substantial self-reliance in science and technology. If it doesn't sound like much it is because it was not much, relative to the scale and intransigence of the predicament. If the agenda had been arranged so that it dealt with matching advanced and appropriate science and technology to the priorities of the developing countries for human needs and industrial growth, instead of featuring intractable political squabbles and parading old grudges, the time would have been better spent.

The rhetoric of the United Nations is better suited to amplifying differences than to reaching accommodations. Quieter and better things will be done, now that the noise has abated, through bilateral projects, specialized agencies, industrial approaches based on partnership principles, and the work of concerned scientists of both North and South. For all the posturing at UNCSTD, it was not a total loss. Those who were there will not find it easy to dismiss the global dissatisfaction of which Vienna was an awkward but very human symbol. While it lasted, serious men and women on each side of the development divide were searching each other out and communicating.

In the near term, despite all that was said at Vienna, there will be no dismantling of the vast advantage in science and technology enjoyed by the advanced nations over the developing world. Modest steps will be taken and some good will be achieved on that scale. But these are times when the advanced economies are themselves troubled and preoccupied with their internal problems of inflation, energy, productivity, and the worries of an unstable peace. Meanwhile, a wind is rising.—WILLIAM D. CAREY