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The American Association for the Advancement of Science was founded in 1848 and incorporated in 1874. Its objects are to further the work of scientists, to facilitate cooperation among them, to improve the effectiveness of science in the promotion of human welfare, and to increase public understanding and appreciation of the importance and promise of the methods of science in human progress.

Unnecessary Research Institutes

There is one kind of independent research institution that we wish to challenge: the small, inadequately financed one that is formed to secure government grants and contracts and to live on the proceeds of such support.

But first, there are a number of independent research establishments to exclude from our strictures. One class is the institute that is established with sufficient financial resources to give it freedom and flexibility and to enable it to maintain a research staff of the size and quality that will provide the support, criticism, and stimulation that characterize any good laboratory. Germany has long made good use of such independent research institutes, and our Carnegie Institution is a sterling example of excellent management and outstanding research.

Not infrequently there is a compelling reason for the independent location and sometimes the independent management of a research institute. Oceanographic research laboratories need the seacoast. The Geological Survey's volcano observatory stands on the rim of Kilauea. Green Bank, West Virginia, was chosen for the National Radio Astronomy Observatory because that site best met such necessary criteria as freedom from electronic interference and freedom from damaging winds. Some of these installations are managed by a university, some by a combination of universities, and some in a different fashion. But none is, in the traditional sense, part of a university or university department. In each case, the nature of the research to be carried out, the availability of research material, or the interests of the sponsoring agency have determined the location and the separation from traditional academic arrangements. Moreover, since each is established to meet a special need, arrangements for continued financial support are usually part of the initial planning.

But there is another group of independent research institutions for which no such compelling reason seems to exist. These are institutions established for the pleasure, the profit, or the aggrandizement of their organizers. Their continued existence is dependent upon securing grants from government agencies or private foundations. They are financially dependent upon the agencies that support them, but since they are not really needed by those agencies, the support is likely to be on a short-term or individual-grant basis. Thus they do not have the independence that is a requisite for freedom. Lacking this strength, they can still recruit staff by paying higher salaries. But in terms of the total scientific effort, all they accomplish is to move a few men from university laboratories and contact with students to enable them to carry out pretty much the same kind of work they could have done at their universities, often with better resources of colleagues, library, and equipment. Neither in terms of economics nor of the advancement of science does it seem desirable to support such institutions.—D.W.