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## International Meetings

When conducted under optimum conditions, international scientific meetings provide a splendid setting for constructive interchange. As important as formal sessions is discussion in small groups and person-to-person. Such contact permits mutual quick evaluation of quality of mind and character. Judgments can lead to long-lasting confidence. In a world ceaselessly troubled by tensions and antagonisms, international friendships should be fostered.

But most international meetings are not conducted under optimum circumstances. Indeed, Americans who complain about their own national meetings find that, by comparison, the large international gatherings held abroad are often a shambles. The complaints are many. Under unfavorable circumstances the visiting scientist is harassed almost endlessly. There are problems about visas and travel. Housing reservations are not honored, and the visitor is consigned to a third-class hotel far from the meeting. Advance programs are not available, and no one seems to know where and when sessions will be held. When a schedule is available, it is not honored. No central directory of participants is maintained, and personal interchange is difficult.

To the long list of annoyances a new one has been added, which could destroy the possibility of holding truly international meetings. The new factor is the injection of cold-war politics. This year five major international meetings were held in Russia. Four were marred by controversial political activity.

The oceanographers began this summer's series of meetings in Russia. The consensus of those attending was that the meeting was well conducted and worth while. However, there were cold-war overtones. Prior to the meeting, informal assurances were given that a visit by a U.S. oceanographic research ship would be welcomed. At the last minute the Russians reneged.

The crystallographers, who were next, enjoyed a pleasant, non-controversial session.

The microbiologists were less fortunate. Confusion reigned. Papers were not on schedule. There was a shortage of interpreters. No central directory was maintained. In addition, a commissar called on all scientists to "unite in condemning U.S. aggression in Vietnam."

The psychologists were also greeted by a commissar. He said that he welcomed scientists attending the congress, including those from the United States, in the belief that all scientists were "working to end U.S. aggression in Vietnam." Subsequently the International Union of Psychological Science adopted the following bylaw:

The host society or association shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that political matters are not introduced into the ceremonial and social occasions which form part of a Congress.

During the mathematicians' congress the behavior of the Russians seemed correct. However, that of many others was not (*Science*, 7 October). Much of the energy of participants went into discussion of politically oriented resolutions.

Just recently there have arisen two grounds for hope that the trend toward excessive cold-war political activity can be arrested (News and Comment, *Science*, this issue). Implementation of the resolution adopted by the Council of the National Academy of Sciences would be helpful. In addition the International Council of Scientific Unions has emphasized the need of avoiding political activity at meetings under its sponsorship. The total direct and indirect costs of international congresses amount to tens of millions of dollars a year. The congresses are too costly and too potentially valuable to be allowed to be marred by mediocre arrangements or cold-war political activity.—PHILIP H. ABELSON