Science Policy: Committee Studies International Aspects

Congressional hearings on scientific and technical matters have become commonplace in recent years, but, by any measure, the Super Bowl of such proceedings is the annual meeting of the House Science and Astronautics Committee and its Panel on Science and Technology. With the stated object of teaching science to the congressmen and politics to the scientists, the committee and its panel pick a broad topic and then meet for 2 or 3 days in a seminar format to listen to prepared papers and talk back and forth.

The latest session, held last week, was on the topic of "Government, Science, and International Policy." To deal with this, the committee, chaired by Representative George Miller (D–Calif.), invited not only its 16-member panel but also Secretary of State Dean Rusk and seven representatives of foreign and international organizations concerned with science policy planning.* Since better understanding, rather than any legislative formulation, was the object of the sessions, it is difficult to assess the consequences with any precision, but there was a great deal of talk, much of it quite illuminating, and it is a reasonable assumption that the scientists and politicians gained some knowledge about each other's problems, desires, and blind spots.

Rusk, who was the first witness, paid his respects to the impact of science and technology on foreign affairs and proposed that "a distinguished committee, drawn from the natural sciences, the social sciences and industry . . . be impanelled about every five years to explore our technology and scientific future." He did not explain, nor was he asked, why the top science post in the State Department has been vacant for 2½ years.

Donald F. Hornig, the President's science adviser, cautiously raised the possibility that the United States might reduce the "brain drain" from underdeveloped nations by seeking some assurance that foreign researchers coming here "have something to return to." He emphasized that the problem was a difficult one and that his thoughts were very tentative. S. Husain Zaheer, chairman of India's National Research Development Corporation, argued back, however, that his country gained in the long run from its scientists' working abroad in fields that were not flourishing at home. They contribute to science, he said, and, as facilities improve in India, they often return to help with the further development of Indian science and technology. "In my four years in office," Zaheer reported, "I was able to bring back nearly 3000 scientists who were settled abroad for more than five years."

On the so-called technology gap between the United States and Western Europe—which President Johnson is seeking to close (*Science*, 9 December 1966)—Robert Major, chairman of Norway's Royal Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, had the following to say: "There is no doubt a gap but I am not so sure that the basic reason for it is lack of scientific and technological activity in Europe. Many examples can be given where European countries have been leading in science and technology, but nevertheless lost the production race. I think the reason for the gap is more the difference in mentality and attitude, managerial skill, and markets. I think on this side of the Atlantic you are more dynamic, more geared for the future . . . with a big home market free of customs barriers. . . . Scientific and technological activities could easily be expanded in Europe if there were industrial management and government administrations capable of making better use of them."

On another subject, Representative James Fulton of Pennsylvania, the ranking Republican on the committee, expressed his concern about adverse social effects of rapidly advancing technology. Major responded that "science, the pursuit of truth, had to be free, but government definitely had to have a say in the application of science."

Responded Fulton, "Would you permit me in the name of science to plant electrodes in your brain so I control your thought?"

Major responded that "that is a use of scientific study." "It certainly is a use of you," declared Fulton. Major said, "Yes," and Philip Handler, one of the moderators, broke in to say, "I think Mr. Major has very well voiced the thoughts of scientists . . . the world over." Whereupon he called on another speaker.

The end of the first day of proceedings was followed by a reception at a Capitol Hill hotel, to which the committee invited its panel, its foreign guests, and some 200 members of the Washington science policy community. Though virtually none of the guests was aware of it, the cost of the reception, about $2000, was picked up by North American Aviation, whose principal customer, NASA, comes under the legislative authority of the Science and Astronautics Committee. A committee aide explained that "we [the committee] have no funds for entertainment, so we ask various Washington representatives if their companies want to pay for the party. This year North American agreed to do it." A North American spokesman said the $2000 comes out of "company profits and is not charged to government contracts."

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*Those who attended were as follows. *Panel members*: Clay P. Bedford, Harrison S. Brown, Lee A. DuBridge, Clifford C. Furnas, Martin Goland, Walter J. Hesse, Thomas F. Malone, W. Albert Noyes, Jr., Roger Revelle, Richard J. Russell, H. Guyford Stever, James A. Van Allen, Fred L. Whipple, and Maurice J. Zucrow. (Edward J. Baldes and Clarence P. Oliver were members who did not attend.) Harrison Brown and Philip Handler served as moderators. *Guest panelists*: Carlos Chagas, ambassador, Brazilian permanent delegate to UNESCO; André de Blonay, secretary general, Interparliamentary Union, Switzerland; Donald F. Hornig, director, President's Office of Science and Technology; H. W. Julius, director, Central Organization for Applied Scientific Research (TNO), Netherlands; Kankuro Kaneshige, professor emeritus, University of Tokyo, member, Council for Science and Technology, Japan; Robert Major, director, Royal Norwegian Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, Norway; Frank J. Malina, trustee and past president, International Academy of Astronautics; S. Husain Zaheer, chairman, National Research Development Corporation of India.

It is expected that the proceedings will be published in about a month. Copies may be obtained, without charge, by requesting hearings of the Panel on Science and Technology Eighth Meeting, from the Committee on Science and Astronautics, House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.