5 May 1967, Volume 156, Number 3775 **SCIENCE**

Public-Private Organizations

President Johnson's committee to review Central Intelligence Agency support of private organizations that operate abroad submitted two basic recommendations: that covert support of educational and private voluntary organizations be stopped, and that a public-private mechanism be developed to provide open governmental support of overseas activities of selected private organizations.

The President's committee concentrated on overseas activities, but the question of public support of private organizations that work for the public good is a wider one. In the 1966 annual report of the Carnegie Corporation, Alan Pifer advocated governmental support of selected scholarly and professional associations, health and community action agencies, nonuniversity research and educational institutions, defense advisory organizations, and agencies providing technical assistance. There is little doubt that it is desirable to have strong, independent organizations of all these types, but financing is a problem. Their own resources are often inadequate. Foundations cannot supply permanent help. Project-by-project support endangers independence. Pifer concludes that continuing government support is the only solution: "If we want to avoid an ever more extensive and powerful Federal Government, it would seem that we must now, paradoxically, use federal money to ensure that we have a viable alternative—a network of vigorous, well-financed nongovernmental organizations ready to serve government but able, in the public interest, to maintain their independence of it."

In response to his committee report, the President has now appointed a new committee, under the chairmanship of Secretary Rusk, to study ways of achieving the proposed mechanism for using public funds to assist private organizations that serve public purposes.

The provision of open and continuing support of organizations that operate overseas, as the President's committee recommended, or of a wider range of agencies, as Pifer proposed, presents a problem which Great Britain has solved more satisfactorily than the United States has. "It is no longer a bishop or a queen or a merchant-prince, but the little man in the street, who is the patron of learning. The little man in the street is very powerful. He is liable to exercise what de Tocqueville called the despotism of the majority." Sir Eric Ashby wrote these words about universities, but they apply as well to the institutions Pifer and the President's committee had in mind. That the despotism of the majority has not been exercised over British universities, Ashby continued, is due "to a very simple but remarkable device which has been invented in Britain for subsidizing intellectual activity without endangering its independence. It is a political invention of the first importance. It is simply this: Parliament entrusts financial control of science and other intellectual activities to bodies of men whose sympathies and interests lie less with Parliament than with those whom they are controlling."

This political invention is exemplified in Great Britain by the University Grants Committee and the British councils, and in several other countries by comparable institutions. A U.S. example is the peer system of evaluating research proposals submitted to government agencies. Pifer and the President's committee want to extend the principle so that we may avoid the dangers of covert support and government control while we gain the advantages of strong, independent nongovernmental organizations that serve the public interest.—DAEL WOLFLE