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CACTAL: Cooperation for Progress

The specialized Conference on the Application of Science and Technology to the Development of Latin America (CACTAL) will be held in Brasilia from 12 to 19 May 1972.

This government-level conference conducted by the Organization of American States results from a decision made at the First Regular Session of the OAS General Assembly (June and July 1970) and reflects the spirit of the "consensus of Viña del Mar" (May 1969). It will include representatives of the 23 member nations as well as a number of invited observers, and will bring together representatives of government and the economy from the several Latin American countries and persons of high-level technical competence from throughout the hemisphere. It will also provide an opportunity for members of the scientific and technological community to confer with members of other professional communities—social, political, industrial, and financial.

The focus of CACTAL, unlike that of earlier conferences, will be upon national and regional needs as they translate into scientific and technological requirements for effective ameliorative action. Its point of view will be that of the consumer rather than of the producer of science and technology. The major emphasis will be on concrete opportunities for the uses of science and technology and the strategies that will make such uses a reality. The agenda will deal with what C. P. Snow has called the primal things—years of life, freedom from hunger, survival for children—and those instrumentalities (better nutrition, health-care delivery, housing, education, and physical and social surroundings) needed to help ensure the primal things and make the difference between surviving and living. It not only will include a consideration of currently available technologies but will give attention to the creation of new technologies, the complex problems of scientific manpower and training, methods for more effective dissemination of scientific and technological information, the essential questions of finance in regard to technological development, and the evolution of new mechanisms of public policy.

The immediate goal of CACTAL is a final report that will identify ways in which OAS efforts in science and technology will aid in the realization of Latin American social and economic goals, and that will provide guidelines both for the cooperation of governments with international and regional organizations and for the involvement of private industry, labor and—to use Greenough's phrase—the Independent Sector: universities, foundations, and other philanthropic institutions. One may hope for a long-needed comprehensive inventory of scientific and technological resources. One would urge consideration of the implications of shifting industrial patterns from goods- to service-producing employment and the inevitable trade-off between the toward and the untoward consequences of technology.

Apart from the formal policy recommendations, the most important achievement of the conference could be the detailed national studies prepared at the request of the conference planners, along with keener appreciation of the importance of systematic planning in matters involving science and technology. In addition, personal associations between scientists and nonscientists which facilitate communication across national, institutional, and professional boundaries will have been established to the end of greater and more rapid social and economic progress.

—WILLIAM BEVAN