

Wilson International Center: A Washington Connection

A common criticism of Washington is that the intellectual climate of the capital is somehow inhospitable to first-rate scholarly and creative work. A few years ago, however, a small start was made in the name of a scholar-President toward creating conditions in the federal city conducive to excellence in scholarship.

The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars occupies the third and fourth floors in the main section of the Smithsonian Institution's original building, the neo-Romanesque "castle" on the Mall. The quarters are viewed as temporary, since the center represents only a partially realized national memorial to the 28th President. The Wilson Memorial Commission recommended that the center have a building of its own in downtown Washington, but the center's prospects for getting a site and structure are, at best, uncertain, and for the immediate future its functions are likely to be limited to the present fellowship program for 40 American and foreign scholars.

The memorial commission, which reported in 1967, plumped for creation of a Wilson Memorial Square on Pennsylvania Avenue opposite the National Archives. The square was envisioned as the site of a center for scholars and of other buildings related to Wilson's ideas and accomplishments.

The absence of a first-line university in the Washington area perennially invites initiatives to fill the gap, but a satisfactory formula has been elusive. The Wilson commission, however, seems to have combined elements of two ideas current at the time. The American Historical Association argued that scholars coming to Washington needed a base for their work and help in getting access to Washington's rich resources for scholars. At the same time, a group of Washingtonians—including S. Dillon Ripley, secretary of the Smithsonian, and Dael Wolfe, then executive officer of the AAAS—and foundation officers had been discussing the creation of an institution that

would benefit both visiting scholars and local universities. The idea of having a core of resident scholars at the proposed center seems to have been pressed successfully by this group.

The then Vice President Humphrey and some legislators had interested themselves in the idea of a research center, and the report of the Wilson commission provided a convenient legislative vehicle. In October 1968, a bill was passed authorizing the establishment of an International Center for Scholars, to be located off Pennsylvania Avenue. The act authorized \$200,000 to carry out its purposes, but it specified that no money was to be used for construction.

The late 1960's was a particularly thin time for institution builders, and funds for the site and structure of a Wilson center proved unobtainable. Although the full-blown project was stymied, partisans of the center turned to a scaled-down version that concentrated on the fellowship program. The key action was the matching of the center with a renovation of the historic Smithsonian castle, which had served a variety of purposes, including, at one point, that of a rooming house for young scientists. The law creating the Wilson center had given it its own board of trustees, but put it under the administrative wing of the Smithsonian—on roughly the same terms as the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. So the housing of the center in the attractively refurbished gothic revival building followed logically.

The center is now in its third year of quiet operation. This year Congress appropriated some \$800,000 for operating expenses; federal funds amount to about two-thirds of the center's total budget. This ratio is somewhat less than the ratio hoped for, and efforts are being made by the trustees to increase private support.

In organization and operating principles, the center fairly closely resembles the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences at Stan-

ford. Applications for fellowships are rated by outside experts in the applicant's discipline, the center staff then orchestrates the applications to ensure a mix of disciplines, interests, and ages, and the trustees give final approval to the fellows. Fellows are asked to bring support funds whenever possible, although sometimes it is necessary, particularly in the case of foreign scholars, for the center to provide a supplement to close the gap on Washington living costs. In principle, no fellow should gain or lose financially during his residence.

The terms of appointments vary from a few weeks to a year, and even, in unusual cases, longer. In part because a number of the fellows are drawn from government and the professions, as well as from the universities, the center has broken away from the academic calendar year, and there is steady turnover.

The small staff of the center is headed by Benjamin H. Read. Read, a lawyer, came to the center from the State Department, where, as Executive Secretary, he had overseen the operations of the center and other facilities through which State receives its primary flow of information.

Policy for the center is made by a board of 15 trustees appointed by the President. Under the act of establishing the center, seven of the trustees are government officials and eight are from private life. The terms of the nongovernment trustees is 6 years, and the board's chairman and vice-chairman must be private citizens.

In Washington, where every action is presumed to have political implications, there have been rumors that the Administration, conscious that the center had been organized under the Democrats, had moved to give it a more Nixonian coloration. It has been suggested that the fellowships provided a haven for refugees from the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and that the White House had moved to redress the balance. It was also said that Humphrey, one of the founders of the center, had been unceremoniously ejected last spring from the chairmanship of the board of trustees.

On examination, the rumors seem pretty porous. It is apparently true that Humphrey would have liked to continue on the board, but the chairman must be a private citizen, and Humphrey had returned to the Senate. Humphrey continued in the chairmanship for some time, but the notification

of the change did come rather abruptly. His successor, William J. Baroody, is president of the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI) in Washington.

The institute is a publicly supported, nonprofit research organization whose stated purpose is to provide objective analysis of national and international issues. AEI reports and studies are, for the most part, done by university scholars. Baroody says about 75 percent of the AEI program is financed by foundations, the rest by industry. Ideologically, the institute is not readily characterized. Its reputation puts it somewhere near the center of the spectrum: radicals would probably call it conservative, and reactionaries would call it liberal. One way to indicate its stance is by looking at the economists on the academic advisory board, which is responsible for seeing that the institute's studies have "scholarly depth and balance." Chairman of the board is Paul W. McCracken, former chairman of President Nixon's Council of Economic Advisers, now returned to the University of Michigan. The other economists are Ronald H. Coase of the University of Chicago law school, Milton Friedman of the University of Chicago, Gottfried Haberler, a Harvard emeritus and now a resident scholar at AEI, and C. Lowell Harriss of Columbia. All are, in varying degrees, moderate conservatives by current standards, known for their preference for the free market.

Baroody, with two decades of experience in administering a program of public policy-oriented research, seems a logical choice as chairman for a Republican president. Asked if he felt the White House was exerting pressure on the center, Baroody, a man with a pleasant, low-key manner, said, "I think that President Nixon has a clear sense of what falls in the political realm and what falls outside. This is not a Republican center. It's not a Democratic center. It's a center for scholars."

One of the original trustees appointed by President Johnson, John P. Roche, a former adviser of Johnson's who has now returned to Brandeis University, says that during the Nixon Administration he has seen "no attempt at ideological sandbagging" in center affairs.

There was, in fact, a change in the official statement of policy for the center voted at the last meeting of the board of trustees on 14 December. Sources outside the center had indicated that there was disagreement on the board between those who believed

that the work of the center should be oriented specifically toward public policy issues and those who favored scholarship of a more general kind. Opinions on the board have in fact differed with one group—mostly original trustees, notably Humphrey and attorney Harry C. McPherson—stressing the unique opportunities in Washington for policy studies, and a second group, forming around Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who favored stress on scholarly distinction in the selection criteria. (Moynihan is vice-chairman of the board but was recently designated ambassador to India.) The present majority on the board backs the second view, but members of both groups stress that the question has been a matter of emphasis and never became a polarizing issue. The original policy statement, which said in part, "the focus will be on policy aspects of contemporary and emerging issues," was replaced by the statement, "Emphasis is placed on studies of fundamental political, social and intellectual issues designed to illuminate man's understanding of critical contemporary and emerging problems and to suggest means of resolving such problems."

Baroody says the change was made because the consensus among trustees was that "If there was anything in the semantics which tended to deter anyone from coming, steps should be taken to open rather than restrict" (the terms under which scholars come).

Merit of Appointments

For the theory that the fellowship program provided opportunities for a special kind of patronage, there is not much fuel. It is true that George Reedy, a press secretary to President Johnson, held a fellowship at the center and Earl Mazo, author of a Nixon biography that the President reportedly favored, is currently a fellow, but both of these appointments seem defensible on their merits.

The original aim of dividing the fellowships evenly between American and foreign scholars has been implemented consistently; the terms of the foreign scholars tend to be somewhat longer than those of the American fellows. The mix of fellows is influenced by the trustees' decision to encourage concentration on particular problem areas. There are now four of these—international affairs, environmental problems, oceans, and problems of long-term growth. There are also fellows working outside the specialized groups.

Not surprisingly, the representation of political scientists and other social scientists, lawyers, and government officials is relatively heavy. Dennis L. and Donnell Meadows, who were centrally involved in the project sponsored by the Club of Rome which produced the book titled *The Limits to Growth*, are included among a small number of "guest scholars" appointed by the center and have contracts with the group studying "achievable growth." One close observer noted that the resident fellows in the group are by and large "not people who can cut the mathematical part of growth studies."

At present only two of the center's fellows are physical scientists—Eugene Rabinowitch, and Athelstan Spilhaus, both well-known senior members of the scientific community. Spilhaus, a meteorologist, oceanographer, and environmentalist has been working with the environmental problems group. Rabinowitch, a founder and editor in chief of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* and a professor at the State University of New York at Albany, is working on a book about the impact of scientific developments on contemporary society. He is not part of one of the joint efforts at the center. At the moment he is working on the effects of scientific revolutions on economics and "is concerned with talking to some good economists" interested in the subject.

It may well be that the center's future will be determined by its success in playing intellectual broker—matching fellows with relevant resources in Washington—a role that the trustees and director see as essential. The fellows generally seemed pleased with their offices, the typing-pool, duplicating, and library services afforded them. The center has a big, elegantly appointed combined library-common room which serves as a social center and site of seminars and small discussions with visiting scholars and luminaries like West German chancellor Willy Brandt.

But Washington remains, in the phrase of trustee Harry McPherson, "less than a paradise for scholars." For the scholar, the capital contains rich resources, people and archives and libraries; the difficulty for the outsider has been to find his way through the Washington maze. The center has sought with increasing success to direct the scholar to his sources. And, as McPherson says, "If the center is ever going to be what it started out to be, we've got to find a way to do that."

—JOHN WALSH