Science and Loyalty

Early in 1955, The Assistant to the President requested the National Academy of Sciences to advise on the formulation of Federal Government policy dealing with the relations between questions of loyalty and the award of grants and contracts in support of unclassified research [Science 121, 7A (11 Feb. 1955)]. We are pleased to be able to publish in this issue of Science the recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences.

Although there is not yet any indication of whether these recommendations will gain Government-wide acceptance, there is encouraging evidence that that may occur. The policies of the National Science Foundation are completely consistent with the Academy recommendations. So, too, are those of the United States Public Health Service. Because of earlier criticisms of that agency, we recently wrote to Surgeon General Scheele to ask about current policies. In his reply, he stated:

"In the past several months the Public Health Service has, within the limits of available appropriations, approved all recommended research and training grant applications on the basis of scientific merit assessed by our advisory groups. We follow a practice similar to that described by the National Science Foundation in its Fifth Annual Report, recently published. In considering matters reflecting on loyalty, the Public Health Service does not knowingly make or continue a grant to any individual who: (1) is a member of the Communist Party as established by admission or by formal proceeding, or (2) avowedly advocates change in the U.S. Government by other than Constitutional means; or (3) has been convicted of sabotage, espionage, sedition, subversive activity under the Smith Act, or a similar crime involving the Nation's security. We agree with the Foundation that the Government should not knowingly support anyone who is, by admission or conviction, disloyal to this country."

Scheele added that the same practice applies to persons who receive funds from grants made to medical schools or other institutions, and that recipients of fellowships and other kinds of direct individual support are asked to sign a loyalty statement.

There are difficult questions involved in the handling of loyalty problems by a scientific agency that is not and should not be an investigative agency. One is the question of what should be done with unevaluated evidence that seems to question the loyalty of a potential or actual grantee. The National Science Foundation and the National Academy of Sciences have met that question by deciding that any substantial derogatory information should be forwarded to the Department of Justice for appropriate action.

There are also principles to be adhered to in making research grants. Two that were endorsed by the AAAS Council in 1954 [Science 121, 249 (1955)] are (i) where questions of national security are not involved—as they are not in unclassified research—the scientific merit of the proposal and of the investigator should be the controlling factors; and (ii) a federal agency should not support a person whose disloyalty has been properly established. The policy of the National Science Foundation and the United States Public Health Service—based on these principles—seems sound and commendable. Other federal agencies will adopt the same policy if the recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences are followed.—D.W.