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SCIENCE founded in 1880, is published each Friday by the American Association for the Advancement of Science at Business Press, Lancaster, Pa. Entered at the Lancaster, Pa., Post Office as second class matter under the Act of 3 March 1879.

SCIENCE is indexed in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* and in the *Industrial Arts Index*.

Editorial and personnel-placement correspondence should be addressed to SCIENCE, 1515 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington 5, D.C. Manuscripts should be typed with double spacing and submitted in duplicate. The AAAS assumes no responsibility for the safety of manuscripts or for the opinions expressed by contributors. For detailed suggestions on the preparation of manuscripts, book reviews, and illustrations, see *Science* 123, 714 (27 Apr. 1956).

Display-advertising correspondence should be addressed to SCIENCE, Room 604, 11 West 42 St., New York 36, N.Y.

Change of address: The notification should reach us 4 weeks in advance. If possible, please furnish an address stencil label from a recent issue. Be sure to give both old and new addresses, including zone numbers, if any.

Annual subscriptions: \$7.50; foreign postage, \$1; Canadian postage, 50¢. Single copies, 25¢. Special rates to members of the AAAS. Cable address: Advancesci, Washington.

The AAAS also publishes THE SCIENTIFIC MONTHLY.

The National Committee

The National Committee for the Development of Scientists and Engineers took a long time to get appointed [*Science* 123, 662 (20 Apr. 1956)] but has gotten off to a fast start on a program of activities. The committee met first on 15 May and again on 21-22 June. At its first meeting the committee decided to give immediate attention to two problems: the number, training, qualifications, and utilization of technical aides to scientists and engineers; and the improvement of elementary- and secondary-school education in science and mathematics. Working groups were appointed to study these problems. At the second meeting of the committee, both groups presented concrete recommendations of actions to be taken by the various citizens' groups and agencies that are in a position to take effective action.

The committee differs from most federal committees in three important respects: it was appointed for an indefinite, rather than a limited, period of time; its membership consists not of individuals appointed as such but of the presidents or heads of organizations that can contribute directly to the problem of securing better scientific education and more and better qualified scientists and engineers; and, the committee is not primarily advisory to the Federal Government but rather to the represented organizations and the country at large. As the President stated in appointing the committee, "... although the government has a responsibility for increasing the supply and improving the quality of our technological personnel, the basic responsibility for solution of the problem lies in the concerted action of citizens and citizens' groups organized to act effectively."

Accordingly, the committee consists of the presidents of the AAAS, the National Academy of Sciences, the National Science Teachers Association, the Engineers Joint Council, the National Education Association, the Governors' Conference, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and other educational, managerial, and governmental organizations.

With the spotlight shining so brightly on science and engineering, it may happen that overenthusiastic or ill-planned efforts to aid those fields may adversely effect other fields. This danger must be avoided. The AAAS board of directors has asked President Paul Sears to convey to the committee the Association's concern that the interests of society as a whole be kept uppermost in mind, and that actions concerning science and engineering be considered in this light.

There are several reasons why it is appropriate to give special attention to science and engineering. The role of no other major segment of society and industry is changing so rapidly. In periods of rapid growth special problems of manpower supply, of education, and of public understanding are almost inevitable. The scientist's role in military strength, and hence in this country's position vis-a-vis the Soviet Union, gives added and pressing reason for paying special attention to science and engineering.

These reasons justify the appointment of the National Committee and the attention that will surely be given to its recommendations. But they do not mean that science and engineering are more important than are other areas of professional or scholarly endeavor. On the contrary, they increase scientists' responsibility to keep the emphasis undistorted and to make every effort to maintain proper balance with other fields of endeavor.

—D. W.

