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The American Association for the Advancement of Science was founded in 1848 and incorporated in 1874. Its objects are to further the work of scientists, to facilitate cooperation among them, to improve the effectiveness of science in the promotion of human welfare, and to increase public understanding and appreciation of the importance and promise of the methods of science in human progress.

The Same Old Gang?

The complaint is sometimes heard that the advisory boards and committees responsible for major scientific activities of the federal government consist of the same old gang of insiders and that the members are too far removed from their days of active participation in the fields they represent.

In the sense of knowing a good deal about what is going on, the members are insiders, and desirably so; plans and policies for the most effective use of the large amounts of money involved should be in the hands of knowledgeable people. Yet there is also a planned and substantial turnover in the membership of these bodies. Of the 17 members of the President's Science Advisory Committee when that body was given its present status in 1957, only 2 have continued to serve to the present time; 2 others were rotated off and later reappointed. Of the 24 members of the National Science Board of 6 years ago, only 7 are still serving. The Defense Science Board, which advises the Director of Defense Research and Engineering, has 27 members, of whom only 5 were serving 6 years ago, and 2 of the 5 are ex officio representatives of other federal agencies. Membership on the advisory councils to the National Institutes of Health is routinely for a 4-year term, without immediate reappointment.

There is also an unofficial apprenticeship system. Some members of the National Science Board earlier served as members of a divisional advisory committee. A record as an effective adviser to one of the military services usually precedes appointment to the Defense Science Board. Experience on an NIH study committee can provide good training for membership on one of the NIH councils.

Through such apprenticeships, experienced men are brought into the highest councils. Through systematic rotation, the membership constantly changes. But there is still the charge that the average age is too high. It often is. Members of the National Science Board average about 59, and members of the Defense Science Board, 57. The President's Science Advisory Committee has the better average of 49.

The present group of members of major scientific advisory boards is partly a heritage of World War II. That period brought into government service a large number of scientists whose experience and interest quite naturally led to their continued use as government advisers. Now a new generation is ready to replace them, and there is thus an opportunity for deliberate selection of members to cover a wider age range.

Deliberate action will be necessary, for most methods of election and appointment favor men who are widely known and older. One technique that has occasionally been used is to ask each "senior" member of an important, policy-making committee to name a "junior" deputy. The junior need not and usually would not be so widely known as his senior, but usually he would be closer to the laboratory. This technique might improve the work of the committees. Clearly it would provide a larger group of experienced and still comparatively young prospects for appointment to the major boards and councils.

Whatever the means, such boards need both members who have attained considerable experience in handling large responsibilities and members who are close enough to the laboratory to know what is appearing over the research horizons. The gradual retirement of veterans of World War II research activities provides an opportunity to move deliberately toward better balance.—D.W.