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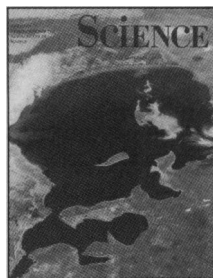
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**COVER** Looking south at the Aral Sea, a large, saline lake in the Soviet Union, from the Space Shuttle (6 August 1985). Sea level fell 11.5 meters between 1960 and 1985, exposing extensive salt-covered areas that appear white. The Amu Dar'ya Delta (light blue) is at top. A salt cloud rises from the sea's southeast coast (upper left). See page 1170. [Photograph courtesy of Michael Helfert, NASA-JSC, mission 51F(24), roll 36, frame 59]

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## The AAAS Observer

A birth is always an event of excitement and anticipation. With this issue of *Science* an infant publication is born, *The AAAS Observer*. Conceived by AAAS Executive Officer Alvin Trivelpiece and edited by Tabitha Powledge, the new publication is designed to bring members into more intimate contact with the activities of their association and other professional and policy issues.

The AAAS is involved in many activities of great benefit to the scientific community, but to many members of the AAAS, *Science* is their only contact with the association. That publication, which had been founded by Thomas Edison as a primary scientific journal, became the official journal of the AAAS in 1900. Over the years, particularly during the editorship of Philip Abelson, *Science* expanded its coverage of news and policy to become both a magazine and a journal and in the process acquired wide circulation. Although this is an asset, it places financial limitations on the magazine's size. *Science* fulfills a major role in an association devoted to science, but that is only one of the organization's functions. In its lifetime, the AAAS has engaged in many other activities that advance the cause of science.

One of its projects is devoted to helping women, minorities, and handicapped individuals toward greater representation in the sciences. As these groups account for a growing fraction of the country's work force, these efforts will make an increasingly valuable contribution toward scientific efficiency in the future.

Another continuing AAAS interest is the education of scientists. Project 2061 is the current project in that area. The decreasing number of young people interested in science must be one of the first concerns of all scientists, and the deterioration of training in science at the elementary and high school levels must be reversed, and rapidly.

Other commitments to the advancement of science involve policy issues, such as arms control, freedom and responsibility, help to countries with arid climates, communication with the national organizations of other countries, publication of books and films, sponsorship of colloquiums on public understanding of science, and many more. In addition, the executive officer and members of the AAAS Board act as spokespersons in Washington, D.C., for many activities in which science needs to be represented before congressional and executive committees. Another major feature of the AAAS is its annual meeting, distinctive in the span of scientific activities it covers and also significant in its emphasis on policy issues, as well as primary scientific publication.

These are a few of the many activities of a society devoted to the advancement of science that are not immediately obvious. *The AAAS Observer* is designed to communicate about these activities with the members of the association and to keep them informed in related areas that advance science. One could ask why all such topics might not be addressed in the pages of *Science*, and the answer relates both to the financial limitations of a wide-circulation journal and the subject matter that is appropriate to that journal. A number of years ago AAAS decided that *Science* should be a scholarly journal in which the advocacy position was minimal and the objectivity maximal. Thus *Science* reports on policy matters from different points of view and describes technological advances that pose hazards as well as benefits to society. In the long run this shows enormous confidence that the advancement of science, like the advancement of democracy, will be best served if the whole truth is presented.

But there is a legitimate place for the passionate advocates; the advancement of science can also be achieved by those who perceive areas in need of improvement and become strong advocates of policy alternatives. *The AAAS Observer* will help, therefore, in implementing the organization's mandate to participate in scientific advancement and to inform the members of what their society is doing. *The AAAS Observer* is not designed as a scholarly journal. It is an informal magazine. It contains no technical articles, no news of breakthroughs. Its "Observations" department is home to a variety of opinion pieces on issues of concern to scientists. The new publication also provides members with a forum for commenting on association activities and will take up policy and professional concerns that are not now being pursued by AAAS programs. Its columns stress the human side of scientific activity. *The AAAS Observer* will take its first breath when removed from its plastic wrapper, with a figuratively friendly spank from an older relative. We wish it well.

—DANIEL E. KOSHLAND, JR.