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Visitors' Visas

In May the Federation of American Scientists reported on the difficulty some foreign scholars have had in securing visas to visit the United States. The report presented a number of case histories, discussed the difficulties of holding international meetings in the United States, and presented a good case for H. R. 3998 or H. R. 4369, two Congressional proposals to eliminate some of the hindrances now experienced by foreigners who are invited to come to the United States to teach, lecture, or attend scientific, industrial, or cultural meetings.

The report reminded us of two earlier articles in *Science*. In his address as retiring president of the AAAS [121, 221 (1955)], E. U. Condon named some of the distinguished contributors to quantum physics: Planck and Einstein in Germany, Bohr in Denmark, Rutherford in England, Lewis in Berkeley, Compton in St. Louis, de Broglie in Paris, Davisson and Germer in New York, Thompson in England, Stern and Heisenberg in Germany, Eckhart in Pasadena, and so on through a continuing list that dramatically illustrated the international character of scientific progress.

The other article, by Edward Teller [121, 267 (1955)], traced the development of the hydrogen bomb. The men on Teller's list worked in the United States, but many came from other lands: Gamow from Russia, Bethe from Germany, Fermi from Italy, Oppenheimer from the United States, von Neumann from Hungary; and Konopinski, Bradbury, Nordheim, de Hoffmann, and others whose names indicate diverse family origins.

The United States has profited greatly from having such men, but in recent years has not been very hospitable either to permanent immigrants or temporary visitors. The FAS report describes the experiences of scientists who were invited to attend scientific congresses or to hold temporary teaching posts but who either were denied admission or who received visas too late to allow them to fulfill the purposes of their proposed visits.

But the picture may be changing. Last April the AAAS held an international meeting on arid lands research and utilization. Participants were selected wholly in terms of their scientific competence. Arrangements were made in advance and the State Department cooperated efficiently. Of the 31 invitees from other countries, only three declined, in each case for reasons unconnected with visa questions. The other 28 all came. One or two experienced slight delays, but not one reported any real difficulties. There have been other reports that entrance difficulties are lessening, and perhaps the current atmosphere of international cooperation may make it easier to bring foreign scholars to the United States.

If this expectation is justified it will mean that existing immigration law is not only out of step with what many consider good policy, but also out of step with current practice. For the law expresses none of the "welcome, friend" attitude currently evident in many international transactions. A change is in national as well as international interest, for an international conference is usually of greater benefit to the host country than to any other and a visit from a distinguished foreign scientist can be as worthwhile for the host as for the guest.—D.W.