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Foreign Travel

In the 3 years ending last June the National Science Foundation allotted \$150,000 to help send American scientists to international scientific meetings held in other countries. Individual grants were modest and usually covered only the cost of air tourist transportation. Through these grants the foundation assisted 178 scientists to attend such meetings as those of the Mathematical Union in Rome, the Congress of Biochemistry in Paris, the Scientific Radio Unit in Sydney, the Pacific Science Congress in Quezon City, and the World Power Conference in Rio de Janeiro.

Since July the foundation has had no money for such purposes; its request for \$75,000 was stricken from the budget by the House of Representatives Subcommittee and so reported to the House when the appropriations bill was considered. The item was not restored in resolving the differences between the House and Senate appropriations measures. The House action was taken in obvious disregard of the long-recognized values of international travel and communication.

In another sphere the Congress has recognized these values. In 3 months last fall, 41 senators and 109 representatives either made trips abroad or announced definite intentions to make such trips. Their cost cannot be determined, for costs were distributed among unreported amounts of counterpart funds, congressional appropriations, and funds of several federal departments. It is highly probable, however, that the total spent or obligated in 3 months was greater than the total spent by the National Science Foundation in 3 years, for it is known that in fiscal 1955 foreign travel of congressmen cost \$136,000 in counterpart funds alone [*Congressional Quarterly* 12, No. 44 (1955)].

The point of the comparison is not to criticize members of the Congress for visiting other countries. Quite the contrary; granting that congressmen, like ordinary citizens, may play as well as work while traveling abroad, their trips can still be justified. Both our foreign relations and our national welfare can be strengthened by allowing congressmen to gain the firsthand information and impressions about other parts of the world that will enable them to legislate more wisely.

But the value of travel abroad is not limited to members of the Congress and other government officials. The nation's cultural relations have been helped by the European tour of the cast of *Porgy and Bess* and by the travel of scientists and other worthy representatives of our national life. The benefits are partly those of increased knowledge, for the traveler sometimes learns things sooner or more thoroughly than he otherwise would. The benefits also include the maintenance of open channels of communication and good relations with other countries. An obvious example is the desirability of having the United States represented at the International Genetics Congress in Japan next September. But this is one of the meetings to which the National Science Foundation is now barred from giving support to delegates.

In December the Council of the AAAS in a formal resolution expressed its hope that funds would be made available to the National Science Foundation and other appropriate federal agencies to permit them to send selected representatives to international scientific meetings. We hope that in the current session the Congress will approve budget requests for this purpose; last year's refusal was shortsighted economy.—D. W.