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EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE: 1515 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20005. Phone: 202-387-7171. Cable: Advancesci, Washington. Copies of "Instructions for Contributors" can be obtained from the editorial office. ADVERTISING CORRESPONDENCE: Rm. 1740, 11 W. 42 St., New York, N.Y. 10036. Phone: 212-PE 6-1858.

Science in the State Department

The Department of State's program of sending scientific attachés to major foreign capitals was started early in the 1950's. Promising but on trial at first, faltering and almost dead a few years later, the program has now gained in size, in acceptance, and in responsibility. Scientific officers represent the U.S. in some 15 foreign capitals. To back them up, the Department of State's Office of International Scientific Affairs has grown to include a professional staff of approximately 20. The office here and the attachés abroad serve as bridges between American and foreign scientists; in more than purely scientific ways they exemplify and further a friendly spirit of international cooperation; and they advise the Department of State and our ambassadors on matters in which science and technology are involved. If the amount of work they are called upon to do is a valid measure of acceptance, the program has established its position and usefulness.

How effective a scientific officer can be in a particular situation depends in part upon the ambassador and the other foreign-service officers with whom he works and upon their interest in and knowledge of how to use the services of their scientific colleagues. The Foreign Service Institute of the State Department recently made a contribution to better utilization by conducting a 4-week science seminar that was supported by the Ford Foundation and that gave a number of foreign-affairs practitioners an intensive course on the role of science and technology in foreign relations. A description of the course, by L. F. Audrieth and H. I. Chinn, and the keynote address to the seminar, by James R. Killian, both appear in the May issue of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*.

The seminar appears to have been productive. And the recent announcement that the name of the office had been expanded to "International Scientific and Technological Affairs" and that the director would have rank and authority equivalent to an Assistant Secretary of State may enhance the prestige of the program. But these changes are not adequate substitutes for filling the top position, which has been vacant since Ragnar Rollefson, the last director, returned to the University of Wisconsin in September. The lack of a scientific director is weakening the State Department's relationships with the community of scientists and engineers and curtailing the ability of the staff to provide the best possible assistance in evaluating the scientific and technological problems that are involved in a widening array of foreign-policy decisions—for example, those dealing with international laboratories, resource development, such cooperative ventures as the study of the Indian Ocean, the technological problems of arms control and monitoring systems, application of science and technology for the benefit of developing nations, or joint arrangements for communication systems, weather reporting, or other technical matters.

Of course the State Department has had other problems to worry about in the past 9 months. Nevertheless, the post of director should be filled without further delay. Still around are a number of people who can remember the situation that arose a decade ago when the top position was allowed to remain vacant; science attachés abroad completed their tours of duty and were not replaced, and the program came almost to a halt. By inaction at that time the Department of State deprived itself of one of its own assets in the conduct of foreign relations. We hope it is not starting on that course again.—DAEL WOLFLE

Science

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Dael Wolfe

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