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AAAS Meetings

The capacity of Americans to form organizations and to conduct huge annual powwows is prodigious. So vast is this activity that it constitutes a major source of revenue for the hotel business. However, the immediate, and especially the long-term, residue of all these gatherings is usually not very much. A notable exception is the AAAS annual meetings. The impacts and enduring effects of these have been great. Ideas foreshadowing major social change have had their first public visibility there.

The typical organization, and indeed most scientific societies, conduct meetings that are designed to cater to a narrow area of common interest. In contrast, AAAS has adhered to policies adopted at an Arden House conference in 1951, which provided, in part, that AAAS should "devote more of its energies to broad problems that involve the whole of science, the relations of science to government, and indeed the relations of science to our society as a whole." This has proved to be a wise policy and one that will continue to be so in the future. We are moving from a familiar era of unbridled growth toward an uncharted pattern of no-growth, from abundance to global shortages. The people's comfort—indeed, their very existence—will be determined by how well science and technology function. To most people, many of the current problems that plague the world have come as a shock. To members of AAAS these matters are old hat. They have been discussed repeatedly in annual meetings and in the pages of *Science*.

Only a minority of scientists are qualified by temperament and interest to grapple with social problems. However, a substantial fraction of those who are so inclined are members of AAAS, and many of them attend and participate in the meetings. In addressing social problems that have a substantial scientific or technological component, scientists and engineers bring a number of talents and attitudes to the task, in addition to their detailed knowledge. They tend to be future-oriented. They strive to elect significant goals. They are trained to identify the crucial variables. They are problem-solvers.

The coming meeting in San Francisco (24 February through 1 March) largely follows the precedents of the earlier ones. In more than 100 symposia, ranging in length from a half-day to several days, a broad spectrum of topics will be dealt with. Some are nearly completely scientific in character. Most have a social component.

One of the 2-day symposia represents something of a departure from past practice. It has been arranged by the cochairmen of the meeting, William R. Hewlett and Glenn T. Seaborg. They have selected and recruited as participants a very distinguished group, largely of non-scientists. The topic is "The San Francisco Bay Area: Looking toward the 1990's." Such matters as population trends, energy use, housing needs, quality of the urban environment, transportation, health, education, and Bay Area economics will be discussed. Participants will include Ed Reinecke, lieutenant governor of California; Charles Hitch, president of the University of California; and Edgar Kaiser, Sr., chairman of the board of Kaiser Industries.

The Bay Area has an excellent record of leadership and innovation. Its educational institutions are unsurpassed. It has a habit of translating serious talk into serious action. The very atmosphere of the place stirs the blood and leads to achievement. The symposium on the Bay Area in the 1990's could mark a crucial moment in the development of this vital region. It could also foreshadow like developments in other parts of this country.—PHILIP H. ABELSON