Letters

Science Policy

The Geoscientist and Canadian Science Policy by Dr. E. R. W. Neale, in your fourth issue (November 1974, p. 33-38) was a most welcome contribution. I feel sure that I am not alone in hoping that it will prove to be but the first in a continuing series of papers in *Geoscience Canada* dealing with public issues of interest to geoscientists, to supplement the excellent scientific papers that you are regularly publishing.

The *Gleanings from a SCITEC Forum* that Dr. Neale incorporated in his paper were especially valuable in bringing to the attention of the geoscientific community the impressions made upon a singularly acute observer by a rather unusual meeting. All readers are indebted to Ward Neale for this service.

It seems clear that parts of his paper were deliberately provocative, designed to promote discussion. May I accept this implied invitation even at this date (the lateness of which I regret), and even though I agree with so much that is said in the paper? I have one major disagreement, one suggestion for extension of a basic concept of Dr. Neale, and one general comment. Let me make my comment first.

The clarity and impartiality of the presentation were weakened, in my view, by the occasional use of an emotionally-charged word or phrase. The very first paragraph, for example, finishes with these words: ". . . the manipulation and intrigue supposedly associated with top management." To what "top management" does Dr. Neale refer, I wonder - of Universities, in business, or in government? Having served for more than a decade in each of these three fields, I am at a loss to understand the rationale for such a sweeping statement.

In discussing the Science Council of Canada, Dr. Neale says: ". . . as 11 of the 29 members and associates of the Council were senior government officials the objectivity of the Council's decisions and its freedom of discussion were questioned from the start." One may well ask - Questioned by whom? - since this is a thoroughly unjustified slur upon as fine a body of servants of the public as one could wish to serve with. I wish that I could say that the questioner was clearly not the author but, unfortunately, the same insinuation is made about the National Advisory Committee on Research in the Geological Sciences, the chairman of which has always been the respected Director of the Geological Survey of Canada. Against the background of such varied service as I have mentioned, I can assure Dr. Neale that the most biased committee members with whom I have ever had to work were those from one or two Canadian Universities. On the other hand, during the years of my service in Ottawa, I was frequently surprised, but delighted, to see the extent to which senior public servants would go in order to be truly objective.

NRC grants for geoscience research are averred to have been "belated". From intimate personal knowledge, I can assure Dr. Neale that the late Dr. Steacie gave his emphatic support to the earliest applications for grants for geological research. These early applications followed by some years the slow development of grants for geotechnical work, the first of which was given (I think) in 1950. And the NACRGS grants were always made in close association with the NRC grants, the two being complementary.

Finally by way of comment, why were prompt replies and action by NRC "astounding"? One might think from this that the National Research Council was some ossified, out-moded bureaucracy. Speaking only for the Division for which I used to be responsible, from its start we did our best (despite the flood of paper that arrived every working day) to see that every letter was acknowledged within 48 hours, and a full reply or action taken within a week or 10 days. Astounding? Just good business practice.

Turning now to major matters, I cannot agree with Dr. Neale's apparent commendation of the Report of the Senate Special Committee on Science Policy. The anti-NRC bias of this remarkable document must have escaped Dr. Neale's attention, a real example of lack of objectivity, and even of accuracy in describing the Council. Although members of the Committee are reported to have gone on the "grand tour" of Europe, they did not take the short drive to the east end of Ottawa in order to see for themselves the laboratories of the Council of which they were so critical.

If only they had done so, they would have seen many examples of the "unbroken spectrum from basic research through to innovation" (Neale). The Division of Building Research would have provided many examples such as basic work in the pure chemistry of cementitious materials, generated by practical problems with concrete, all the way through to the designing of the first special enclosures for protecting the placing of concrete in cold weather.

It is, however, the unquestioned acceptance of the Senate Committee's proposal for a strange body called SCITEC that baffles me. Even the name is wrong since, as is well known, the profession of engineering in Canada - now 80,000 strong - has no connection with the organization. 'Engineers' should therefore be removed from the title, the Canadian Society of Chemical Engineers being (I believe) the only

engineering society that has membership. Engineering technicians, an admirable and vital group but non-professional, are now being well organized in Canada. Presumably the 'technology' in the title refers to this group since it has no relation to professional engineering. Why the outmoded term 'Science and Technology' keeps cropping up is yet another mystery.

It is a wonder that those responsible for trying to make SCITEC work have not been warned by the continuing difficulties down the years of both B.A.A.S. and A.A.A.S., which really are 'grass roots organizations' in a way that SCITEC can never be. In this same connection, Dr. Neale refers to "unconditional" grants; presumably it is hoped to finance the Canadian House of Science and Technology (why Technology?) in this way. Surely this eminent geologist knows that there are no such things as "unconditional grants" of public funds. Even when there are no legal constraints, there are always some unwritten ethical conditions that cannot be forgotten.

This suggestion of reliance upon state funding for normal scientific society operations alarms me. One might think that scientific societies were playing with the totalitarian idea instead of responding to the privilege of operating in a society that is free, dependent still upon individual initiative. I trust that I am not alone in hoping that geoscientists at least will be willing to 'stand on their own feet and be counted', throwing off all financial bonds with government, be they conditional or "unconditional".

The Canadian Geoscience Council shows, I think, what can be done (apart only from the fact that a part of its funding comes from the Government of Canada; let us hope that this is but a temporary condition). The Council points the way to a sound pattern of scientific organization. Here, it will be seen, I have put argument behind and join forces with Ward Neale in looking ahead. I agree with him that organization on a national scale is essential although I see no reason to go as far as the "one big union" idea. Size, of itself, is no virtue.

If there were to be bodies corresponding to the Canadian Geoscience Council in each of the major scientific disciplines, their united voice could be heard in the halls of Parliament. The Canadian Council of Professional Engineers now represents in this way the eleven provincial associations of professional engineers, and so the entire engineering profession of Canada, enjoying close liaison with the voluntary technical engineering societies especially with the Engineering Institute of Canada.

The Canadian Geoscience Council has made an auspicious start. With Ward Neale I am encouraged by its progress to date. With him I agree fully that we must "find common ground" with other scientific disciplines and with the profession of engineering and be prepared to work together for the common good, even if this does mean occasionally leaving the halls of academe.

Robert F. Legget
531 Echo Drive
Ottawa, Ontario K1S 1N7

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