

## WASHINGTON LETTER

*For science news in Washington, Physics Today turned to a man eminently qualified to report scientific events from a physicist's viewpoint. As head of the National Research Council's Office of Scientific Personnel, Dr. M. H. Trytten's normal duties provide contact with most of the major scientific events in Washington. But he speaks here for himself, not for any official organization—which is the freest way of writing such a monthly letter.*

*The Editor*

Events of importance to science have been happening in Washington since the war in almost unbroken series. In some cases, the struggle for mutual understanding among scientists and politicians, administrators and military personnel may have its less happy aspects, but because of the great power of science in national and international affairs at the present time, some of this is inevitable. On the whole, considerable understanding is being achieved.

The Science Foundation Bill, which has been so much talked about among scientists, appears now to have achieved a form generally acceptable to scientists, the Congress, and the Government. If the bill secures a place on the calendar in the present session, there appears to be no issue remaining to prevent its passage. The bill was introduced by Senator Smith in the Senate and by Congressman Wolverton in the House of Representatives on March 25. The bill was sponsored also by Senators Cordon, Revercomb, Saltonstall, Thomas, Kilgore, Magnuson, and Fulbright.

In the administrative branch of the Government, most of the developments in science result from the necessity for coordinating the far-flung programs of research in the Government agencies, especially those which have grown up since the war. Within the military establishment the mechanism for coordination is the Research and Development Board under Dr. Vannevar Bush, which reports directly to the Secretary of Defense. Through its many committees and panels on which large numbers of civilian scientists serve, the research programs of the services are scrutinized in the interests of coordination and the achievement of a uniform policy.

At a higher level there has recently been established the Inter-Departmental Committee on Research and Development, reporting directly to the President. The Chairman is Dr. Alexander Wetmore of the Smithsonian Institution. Four mem-

bers of this board are physicists: Dr. James Fiske, Dr. Lawrence Hafstad, Dr. Hugh Dryden, and Dr. Edward U. Condon, representing the Atomic Energy Commission, the Research and Development Board, the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, and the Commerce Department, respectively.

These developments reflect an increased importance of science in national affairs, somewhat independent of the international situation. But the worsening of the international situation will have its effect on science. In particular, the demands of preparedness may strongly influence scientific manpower. The President has recently asked for a new Selective Service Act and Universal Military Training. As this is written, conversations with those assisting in developing a proposed draft act indicate that the President will be given broad powers for deferring scientists and science students. However, the development of regulations to accomplish this end will be difficult. Efforts are now under way to develop appropriate policies which can be used as a basis for later regulations. The primary responsibility for determination of policy will be in the National Security Resources Board. Although the passage of Universal Military Training does not now appear as likely as the passage of draft legislation, developments could make even U.M.T. a reality.

Waiting to be resolved are major issues which bear on science. One such is the question of how far and by what means a democracy may move to set aside for special purposes those people who have unusual ability or unusual training and accomplishments important to national security and welfare. This issue will be considerably more acute in any future emergency than in the last war. Another question is the extent to which activities with strong military implications should be under the control of military organizations. These two basic questions will have to be resolved in the near future if there are more positive steps for preparedness. Whether decisions can be made in the light of reason and good judgment, or whether the hysteria produced by world events and by causes célèbres will lead to policies which may be unfortunate in the long run, if not seriously destructive, will be one of the major tests of American democracy. Although these issues are not obtrusive at the moment, they could become prominent in the near future.—M. H. TRYTTEN