

News and views

A Letter to the Editor

Visas for Visiting Scientists

Sir:

There are a large number of foreign scientists, friendly to the United States, who have difficulty entering this country. American visa policy is harmful, not only to those denied temporary admittance, but also to Americans.

The McCarran Act (which the visa division of the State Department is enforcing with the zeal of people who want to say "I told you so") bars members of "Communist-front" organizations from this country. If a scientist wishes to enter this country, *even temporarily*, and he has joined an organization which we call a "Communist-front", he is denied a visa. This happens even if he joined the organization to counter the Communist influence in it. If a jealous colleague falsely denounces him as a Communist, he cannot be admitted, and never even knows the charges against him. If he is willing to wait six months or so, and is eminent enough, the Attorney-General may let him in under special dispensation.

What are the results of this policy? First of all, we lose the opportunity of meeting these people and learning about their work. This hurts us, not them. Secondly, at least one foreign scientist has closed his lab to visiting Americans. Thirdly, our scientific representatives abroad, who are supposed to find out what is going on in Europe for our benefit, do not get a very cordial reception when they visit excluded scientists or their friends. Fourthly, it is hardly a good method of showing Europe the advantages of freedom. All these results hurt America.

It seems possible that the law may be changed. I would think that physicists would have a vital interest in such legislation. Furthermore, scientists are now getting extra special treatment, since decisions, instead of being made abroad, are made in Washington. This leads to intolerable delays, and many mistakes are made.

It may be that all future international meetings should not be held in the United States. I personally feel that this would be unfortunate.

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Science and Foreign Relations

A State Department Headache

The concern experienced by many American scientists during the past months over the government's manner of handling the visa applications of foreign

scientists is based, it has been stated many times over, on a belief that American science cannot be isolated from the rest of the world and still remain healthy and productive. While the interchange of scientists between this and other nations has been greatly stimulated in recent years and is an accepted and approved concept in high government circles, there still seems good reason for supposing that the predicament described in the foregoing letter is real and that it constitutes a threat not only to American scientific progress but also to our foreign scientific relations. It should nevertheless be kept in mind that although the situation has become more aggravated than usual, it is not altogether new.

The visa division of the Department of State is now and for many years has been bound by the provisions of the Immigration Act of 1918, which was directed primarily at Communists and which expressly excludes from the United States any aliens who believe in, advocate, or are in any manner associated with any organization that believes in or advocates the overthrow by force or violence of the government of the United States. Passage of the Internal Security (McCarran) Act of 1950, which was directed not only against communism but against totalitarianism in general, did not change the basic provisions of the Immigration Act although it did enlarge the categories of political activity under which aliens might be found inadmissible.

According to a formal statement of policy issued by the State Department almost one year before passage of the McCarran Act, the terms of the 1918 Immigration Act have always been applied literally. The sense of this particular policy statement, which deals with the admission of aliens desiring to attend conferences held in the United States, appears to be that while the Department wishes to encourage the free interchange of persons and ideas on a world-wide basis, it would not facilitate the attendance at meetings held in this country of any person whose presence it is believed would endanger the safety of the nation and whose entry is therefore forbidden by law—unless the case seems to have significant bearing on the conduct of American foreign relations. According to the policy statement, however, "... the Department of State will not actually take action unless in its judgment the admission of the particular individual would be in the national interest. The only action which the State Department can take is to make or endorse a recommendation to the Attorney General that he authorize the admission of the individual for a limited period of time."

It will be recalled that there have been numerous instances, prior to the McCarran act, in which foreign scientists have experienced difficulty in obtaining visas for travel in the United States. The State Department has been well aware of the problems arising from such instances, if for no other reason than the volume and character of the protests received from American scientists whenever a respected foreign colleague has been unable to enter the country.

The need for good foreign scientific relations has been