

LETTER FROM OTTAWA



New science body for Canada

**A single organization
hopes to speak loud and
clear on science matters**

by Fred Poland

When the question of who speaks for science in Canada was raised last year by a special Senate committee, leaders were embarrassed at not having a good answer. Some 150 representatives of 60 private organizations in science, engineering, technology and medicine gathered in Ottawa soon thereafter to start designing a framework for a new kind of representative association or federation (SN: 9/6, p. 188).

The process has now been completed with the establishment of a new science body for Canada: SCITEC, the National Association of the Scientific, Engineering and Technological Community of Canada. Many fine organizational points remain to be worked out, but in general SCITEC is conceived as a large, wide-ranging, eclectic organization capable of drawing on the expertise of specialists in all fields, including the social sciences, to help develop a better understanding in the Federal Government and among the general public of the important issues that relate science and technology with society.

In more official terms, SCITEC's objective is "to marshal the scientific, engineering and technological community to provide leadership and to communicate, cooperate and work within itself with governments and the public in the national interest in those areas where it can make a competent contribution."

Whether SCITEC will be able to fulfill the role it has set for itself is a point that only time will reveal, but there seem to be several signs in its favor. One is the degree of cooperation apparent among the diverse and rather complicated science organizations that helped form it and will be represented in it. Another is the caliber and enthusiasm of the leadership. And another is the enlightened attitudes demonstrated toward the importance of the participation of the public, including the young, in the development of policies regarding national scientific affairs.

"The elite organization is no longer representative," says the organization's first president, Dr. Norman S. Grace of Toronto, 54-year-old president of the Chemical Institute of Canada. "You have to get down through the age spectrum," he says, voicing hope that many concerned students will be among the nonspecialists to seek membership.

Dr. Grace, optimistic and admittedly idealistic, says he sees SCITEC as a forum for discussion or debate, a focus for opinion, a channel for advice to the Government and an instrumental force

for the future development of Canada.

Providing independent advice to the Government will probably be SCITEC's most important role, he feels. The hope is that the association will be able to help provide leadership on national problems having some scientific and technological orientation, such as manpower, natural resources, urban affairs and communications. Although drawing on membership from diverse areas, SCITEC, it is hoped, will be able to act in such advisory matters as one organization, or, as the officers like to refer to it, as a single community.

Working bodies will include a national opinion committee geared to prompt study of such pronouncements as the forthcoming report on science policy of the Lamontagne committee. This is the special Senate group headed by Maurice Lamontagne, a professor of economics, which has been studying Canadian science policy since 1967. The intention is that SCITEC would then be able to "say something loud and clear on a matter that is likely to affect research planning for a generation," as one founder put it.

SCITEC, however, will also be concerned with the interpretation of science to the public and the development of mutual understanding between the various scientific specialties, which now often tend to isolate themselves from each other.

When the first organizational conference was held last year, the need for a voice of science and technology seemed of overriding importance. But leading founders became more and more concerned with social responsibility in science and communicating with the public.

In contrast with the American Association for the Advancement of Science, debates on a name for the organization started with the unanimous assumption that "advancement" is not a problem. Rather, science has made such progress that communicating its achievements and methods to the layman and getting a feedback from him are urgent tasks.

SCITEC will have two parallel deliberative bodies. Its English-speaking congress will have 200 members drawn from 60 existing federated science societies. Alongside it will be the 46-year-old assembly of *L'Association Canadienne-Française pour L'Avancement des Sciences* (ACFAS), which, although it will continue its long-established program, played a key role in setting up SCITEC.