

LETTER FROM OTTAWA



Pulling together

Canada's disordered science policy is due for reorganization

by Fred Poland

By the end of this year Canada will probably have a new science body, as yet unnamed, and not necessarily like the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

The country may also have a stated national science policy, but the timing is less certain. Strong forces are still pressing for the status quo under which decisions are made piecemeal by various Federal Government departments and with very little consultation with what provincial science policy authorities exist.

If there is any fountainhead of science policy advice to the Federal Government at present, it is C. M. Drury, who chairs the Privy Council Committee on Scientific and Industrial Research. He also has directly responsible to him the Science Secretariat which prepares special reports, usually on a confidential or even secret basis, for the cabinet.

But Drury is also president of the all-powerful Treasury Board. There have been suggestions that with one hat on he may recommend Government support for some research, and, wearing the other, keep the purse strings tight against effective support.

Not surprisingly, Drury has so far taken the view that there is no need for another organization to coordinate scientific efforts in the Government.

The new factor in the situation is the Senate Special Committee on Science Policy, under the chairmanship of Maurice Lamontagne, a professor of economics.

Lamontagne has often said Canada has a science policy "by accident." After more than a year of hearings, the committee is expected to report in late fall. The first report is expected to call for some kind of new coordination, perhaps including establishment of a standing committee of the Senate, headed by Lamontagne, who might enter the cabinet as the Government's top science adviser.

When private bodies such as the Chemical Institute, the Engineering Institute and the Association of Physicists appeared before the Senate body this spring, some committee members raised the question: Who speaks for science?

This led to a hurried call for a science parliament. The meeting, held in Ottawa, was attended by some 150 representatives of 60 bodies in science, engineering, technology and medicine. In short order, they apologized for not having included the social sciences and unanimously instructed the steering

committee to carry on with a *carte blanche*.

The steering committee, to include social scientists, will draft the structure and name of a representative new association or federation and call another gathering before year's end.

Such an organization would speak for science, not only to Government but ultimately to the public. It could have a membership of 150,000—more if lay adherence is encouraged.

The great debate over a science policy to be designed deliberately for the country is thus underway. So far it scarcely involves the public. But people are starting to ask what the scientists are doing with public funds, and are muttering about priorities.

Lamontagne is also worried about priorities. Some 70 percent of the population are urban residents and only seven percent of the labor force is in agriculture, he points out. But the Federal Government is spending \$90 million a year on agricultural research and has spent only about \$3 million in the last 14 years on urban problem studies. Considering the prediction that a decade hence the vast majority of Canadians will be living in conurbations centered on Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, he feels he has a strong talking-point.

Another influential Canadian scientist who favors more deliberate science policies is Dr. O. M. Solandt, president of the Science Council of Canada. The council is composed of a score of top scientists appointed by the Government to give independent advice on long-range science policy but with no role in decision making. Its function is distinct from the National Research Council, now largely a body that grants Federal funds and operates in-shop research projects.

Dr. Solandt, a former chairman of the Defense Research Board, not only weighs in on the side of more coordination of Government policy but wants better scientist-to-public communication as well.

The council's latest report called for a series of mission-oriented programs to help direct the growth of science. At once, it says, Ottawa should launch projects on space and water resources, following through with programs on transportation, urban development, computer applications and scientific aid to developing nations. Stress is on innovation and national economic payoff in the foreseeable future.