

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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O.E.C.D. & Science Aid:
A Case History

"Minden", The Avenue,
Kingston near Lewes,
Sussex.

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Mr. R.H. Nolte,
Institute of Current World Affairs,
366 Madison Avenue,
New York, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Nolte,

My final year as an Institute Fellow has been spent (as you well know) seconded to the Scientific Directorate of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The purpose was to enable me to gain experience with an international organisation interested in the problems of science policy and the developing countries. It has proved to be an extremely interesting year and has provided a useful insight into the problems and frustrations experienced by the secretariat of an international organisation.

As an illustration of the way in which O.E.C.D. functions I propose to describe the case history of a project with which I was partially concerned. It was not considered a particularly important project by most of the member countries, but it is illustrative of both the functioning of an international organisation and of attitudes of various countries to the problems of science and development. It is perhaps superfluous to add in a newsletter that the opinions expressed are purely personal, and do not necessarily reflect official O.E.C.D. policies.

Before delving into the details of this project it will be useful to provide some general background information. First, let me recall that the O.E.C.D. is made up of nineteen European countries plus the U.S.A., Canada, and Japan. It was established after the Second World War as the organisation which very successfully administered the Marshall Plan. It continued after the completion of Marshall Aid as an organisation dedicated to the economic growth of Europe. More recently, in 1961, it was reorganised and now includes most of the more developed non-communist countries in the world.

In the reorganisation of 1961 the role of science and education in economic development was given formal recognition within the Organisation by the creation of a separate Directorate for Scientific Affairs. Initially the work of this Directorate was channelled through two committees: the Committee for Scientific Research; and the Committee for Scientific Manpower. The first committee was concerned with both co-operative research and problems of science policy.

In addition to the studies on science policy initiated by the Committee for Scientific Research, O.E.C.D. also played host to a meeting of Ministers for Science, which was held in Paris in 1964. This was followed by a second meeting two years later, and for these meetings special studies of important science policy issues were commissioned by an interim committee which prepared for the Ministerial meetings.

For the last meeting held in January 1966, these special studies resulted in reports on the significance on the policies of governments of: fundamental research; the allocation of resources for science; the stimulation of innovation; international co-operation in science; and the social sciences.

The success of the work of the interim committee showed the value of having a committee made up of delegates who had special responsibilities for matters of science policy in their home countries. Therefore following the most recent Ministerial meeting it was decided to split the responsibilities of the old Committee for Scientific Research and to replace it with two new committees. The first is responsible for science policy matters, and the second for co-operative research.

I mention these matters in some detail because they are important to an understanding to the operation of the work of the Secretariat. No work can be undertaken unless officially sanctioned by one of the Committees on which all member countries are represented. It is frequently a debatable point on whether the initiative for a particular study lies with the members of the committee, or the Secretariat itself. In my experience of this past year, and seen from the vantage point of the Secretariat, it would seem that the majority of the projects originated with the Secretariat. The techniques of lobbying and scheming to get this or that particular country to propose this or that particular study were all part of the valuable educational lessons learned during my year in Paris. However, once a study has been proposed and duly approved, then it is incumbent upon the Secretariat to carry out the project.

One further piece of background information: the O.E.C.D. is, in effect, the rich man's club, and contains among its members most of the non-communist aid donor countries of the world. Recognition of the special responsibilities which this entails was reflected by the establishment a few years ago of the Development Assistance Committee, and the Development Center. The former exists mainly to coordinate the aid activities of the O.E.C.D. members, and the latter is concerned with education about development in non member, under-developed countries. But O.E.C.D. had no mandate for carrying out operations in non member countries.

Just where and how the question of O.E.C.D. and science aid, or the role of science and technology in the developing countries, was raised, I have been unable to ascertain. Certainly there have been Secretariat memoranda on the subject for at least five years. But the discussions saw official light in 1964 when it was suggested that the policy implications of science aid might be a subject for a background study and discussion at the 1966 Ministerial Meeting. This suggestion was opposed, and eventually defeated, primarily at the instigation of the Germans. However, it was suggested that the Committee for Scientific Research might take it up. This it did, and in its turn appointed a working party to consider science aid and to report back to the committee on the implications for O.E.C.D. action. Professor Bror Rexed of the Swedish Science Policy Council was appointed chairman, and the U.S.A., France, Britain, Sweden, Belgium, and the Netherlands, all agreed to participate.

It was at about this time that I joined O.E.C.D. and worked closely with the members of the Secretariat who were to serve this working party. The first meeting was scheduled for September 1965, and in early June we began to draft a background paper. It happened that the group of four or five of us in the Secretariat who at one time or another were involved with the project, had all come from widely different backgrounds and experience to the same conclusion -- that science and technology form an extremely important element in the development process, and that the sooner people in the developing countries possess their own indigenous science, and learn how to solve their own problems, the quicker will be their prospects of development.

The background paper which we prepared considered ways in which donor countries could help establish an indigenous scientific capability in developing

countries; the problems of transfer of known science and technology; and the creation of new science and technology of especial relevance to developing countries. We suggested that the working party should recommend to the Committee that O.E.C.D. member countries both individually and collectively should increase the amount of aid devoted to science, but only in the context of a well thought out plan or policy which related scientific work to the development objectives of the developing countries. We also suggested that the mechanism for co-operative research in O.E.C.D. should be utilized to solve problems of particular relevance to developing countries.

It is not my intention to reproduce here the case for science and technology in underdeveloped countries. It is a thesis which has gradually been developed over the past fifty newsletters. Suffice it to say that a strong case can be made both for science, and for international action. My purpose in this letter is to trace the workings of an international organisation and to document government responses to this specific project.

By late June the first draft of the background paper was ready and the countries were asked to name their delegates for the first meeting of the working party, and to submit memoranda reviewing the problems they had encountered in providing science aid. Immediately there was an outcry from France and Belgium who maintained there was insufficient time in which to prepare for a meeting in September. The meeting was therefore postponed until November to enable the French and Belgians to return from their vacations and prepare for the meetings.

However, by October it was evident that the French did not want O.E.C.D to become involved with science aid activities, and they declined to send a delegate. Later, they agreed to send an observer.

France was not the only source of opposition. The Secretariat of the Development Assistance Committee was also concerned about what it considered an encroachment into its domain. In some respects this was a valid concern and if it had shown any expertise and interest in stimulating studies on science and development it would have been correct for it to do so. But on the contrary, the Secretariat of the Development Division adopted a hostile stand. This meant that we in the Science Policy Division had, rather artificially, to limit our considerations to only the policy implications of science aid.

The meeting was held in November, but with, I felt, disappointing results. The British adopted a fence-sitting attitude, the Americans were for the project, as were the Dutch and Swedes. The Belgians were non-committal, and the French observer quite hostile. In fact, the unofficial comments of the Frenchman were the most revealing of the whole meeting. His concern was that France could not become involved with any international science aid activities until the recipient countries had been identified. (It was pointed out that what was under discussion were policy issues and not specific aid projects.) He made it quite clear that France would stand no interference from outside in the development of French speaking Africa and made one of the frankest statements of why countries give science aid (or any kind of aid) that I have yet heard. He said that to some extent the reasons were humanistic, but France had invested a lot of money in research facilities in French Africa and she wanted some return from this investment. France also wished to keep the French language alive in the area and hence did not want interference from other countries. Finally, he said France also had its baser economic and political motives for aid.

The only countries with any marked degree of enthusiasm for the study, were the Netherlands and Sweden, both of whom had set up national committees to formulate

their own science aid policies. The Swedish enthusiasm in fact drew a sharp retort from a delegate from one of the ex-colonial powers who suggested that the colonial powers know how to administer their aid projects, and he saw no reason to spend money on a project which would be primarily to teach countries such as Sweden "how to do it".

It was in fact only by some skilful manoeuvring by the Deputy Scientific Director of O.E.C.D., that anything was salvaged at all. It was agreed that the working party would meet again, and that in the interim the Secretariat would revise the background paper, and would prepare the groundwork for a discussion on specific co-operative research ventures -- tying in to the work of the advisory committee to the ECOSOC of the United Nations, which had prepared a report on the applications of science to development.

When Professor Rexed reported to the Committee of Scientific Research on the outcome of this meeting, Germany asked to join the working party.

For the next few months pressure of other Secretariat work prevented any further action on this project. But by May 1966, we had some free time again and after further discussions within the Secretariat it was decided to revise the background paper, paying greater attention to the policy implications.

We were also able to benefit from another O.E.C.D. meeting which had been held in December. This was a meeting of the Directors of the Pilot Teams on Science and Development. They, with several invited consultants, had discussed the problems of planning scientific research to meet economic and social objectives. The O.E.C.D. pilot teams are teams of scientists, economists, and engineers, all nationals of the countries concerned, who had been working for two or more years in each of Turkey, Greece, Spain, Italy, and Ireland. Their task has been to draw up a plan for science which would contribute in the most effective way to their countries' economic and social goals.

This meeting helped to crystalize our thoughts and demonstrated in a vivid way that science and technology are the motor of development and hence should feature in aid programs to a much greater extent than hitherto.

For a variety of reasons it seems that this is not a popular view. It is unpopular with politicians who want to see immediate returns on their investment in aid. Science aid is a long term investment. It seems to be unpopular with traditional economists -- perhaps because they have found no satisfactory way of incorporating the concepts of technological change into the methodology of development planning. It is also unpopular with certain business men who see a reduction in their exports if developing countries embark on science-based industries.

Despite the general unpopularity of the views the Secretariat was convinced of their essential rightness and proceeded to prepare for the next meeting of the working party.

The Secretary General of O.E.C.D. was also receptive to the idea that the interaction of science, technology and development deserved much greater study than hitherto, and privately queried its implications for O.E.C.D.. However, the idea that science was anything more than just one of many relatively insignificant aspects of development seemed repugnant to the Secretariat in the Development Division, and they have fought very hard to prevent any major study or program from being launched.

At one time it seemed likely that the Secretary General would appoint a high level ad hoc group to advise him on what O.E.C.D. should do, but the opposition was

so strong that he decided to defer his decision until the Autumn of 1966.

In the meantime the Science Policy function of the Committee for Scientific Research passed on to the new Science Policy Committee and the working group on science aid was left an orphan. The second meeting of the working party, therefore became an "informal" meeting. It was thought, however, that this meeting could provide the Science Policy Committee with an expression of the importance of science aid, so that it might rank high in the Committee's future agenda. It was also thought that the meeting might initiate a program of co-operative research on projects of special relevance to developing countries.

Members of the Secretariat visited most of the participating countries to explain the situation and to try to obtain some specific proposals for co-operative research. I had perhaps the easiest and most rewarding assignment, visiting The Hague and Stockholm to talk with Dutch and Swedish government officials. Both of these countries were enthusiastically behind the work. There is little doubt that these countries are humanely motivated to help the less developed world and they appreciate that to have a major impact their work must be a part of international action.

The day of the meeting was July 13th (incidentally my last day at O.E.C.D.). Only the Netherlands and Sweden were represented by the same men who had been at the first meeting of the working party. The United States was represented by Colin McLeod (Number 2 in the President's Office of Science and Technology). At first I interpreted his participation as a measure of the official American interest in science and the developing countries. However, this proved to be a mistaken assumption, since McLeod said he had not expected the meeting to last all day and had made other commitments for the afternoon. Thus for half the meeting the United States had no representative.

The meeting began with statements from the chairman and the Deputy Director of the Department of Scientific Affairs, and then got into a discussion of the Pilot Team activities. It very soon became apparent that neither the Americans, British, French, Belgians, nor Germans, had any knowledge of what had transpired at the first meeting of the working group, and in fact most of them appeared to have very little knowledge of the subject at all. The Frenchman had obviously been briefed to take no part in the discussion. The German had been briefed to say that discussion of anything to do with aid was the responsibility of the Development Assistance Committee. But the most amazing performance came from the British delegate. He was an assistant secretary in the Overseas Development Ministry, in charge of research. He began by admitting he was neither a scientist nor an economist, but an aid administrator. He disagreed very strongly with the Secretariat views on the need to develop indigenous science in developing countries stating his view that scientists in the developed world could solve all the problems and export the solutions. He believed that what developing countries needed were more and better administrators. He did, in fact, ridicule the Secretariat paper.

He was followed by the Swedish delegate who began by stating that he also was an aid administrator but he thought our paper one of the best pieces of work on the problems of science aid that he had yet seen. The Netherlands delegate also, once again, gave us strong support.

The British delegate's attack was quite vitriolic, and shattered all hopes of salvaging any positive action from the meeting. With the absence of the U.S. delegate, the afternoon session degenerated into a Secretariat attack on the viewpoint held by the British. An attack which was led by the Director of Scientific Affairs

(also British) who had been present when the British delegate spoke.

The only positive proposal from the entire meeting came from the Swedish delegate who proposed an international co-operative program on research in birth control. By late afternoon the meeting fizzled out completely. Shortly afterwards the chairman took the unusual step of personally visiting the Secretary General of O.E.C.D., and reported on the meeting.

Thus my year with O.E.C.D. came to an end, on what was in many ways a disappointing finale. My colleagues in O.E.C.D. had been among the most brilliant and dedicated men one can find. We had responded to a request from member countries to study the implications of science aid for O.E.C.D.. But a combination of in-house rivalries, political motivations, and just plain lack of interest combined to defeat a program which sooner or later must go ahead. And later could be too late.

The matter now rests with the Secretary General of O.E.C.D.. He can either accept the view of the majority of the members of the working party, who implied that the subject is of little interest and should be of no concern to O.E.C.D., or he can call together an ad hoc group of experts, with a real knowledge of the problem, to advise him on what O.E.C.D. should do.

If he decides on the latter course it is important that the ad hoc group have the mandate to cross established administrative boundaries, so that the problem can be seen in its totality. It should also survey the relative roles of O.E.C.D. and the United Nations in this area. Several delegates to O.E.C.D. meetings expressed their concern at the potential overlap with United Nations activities. Much of the concern is probably unwarranted. Full scale operations in underdeveloped countries are quite clearly the responsibility of the United Nations -- but it should be possible for O.E.C.D. to carry out pilot scale experiments in non member countries (if invited by them to do so). The United Nations should be free and willing to make use of the ideas and experiments of all groups, national or international, O.E.C.D. or COMICON, which showed promise of contributing to the well being of the underdeveloped world.

I have tried in this letter to trace the somewhat turbulent passage of a particular working party through the internal mechanisms of O.E.C.D.. In many ways it was an unusual project and not necessarily typical of the many working parties always on the go.

Regardless of the eventual outcome at O.E.C.D. the experience and discussions will be of considerable value in the program of research on science and the developing countries which I am now beginning at the University of Sussex.

Yours sincerely,

C.H.G. Oldham

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