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In My Opinion

EDUCATION—STEPCHILD OF N.S.F.

"Tell me how a man spends his money and I will tell you where his heart lies." This adage has for many years been well exemplified by the National Science Foundation's budgets for science education, and a review of the planned expenditure for fiscal year 1972 would indicate that this stepchild is now being forced away from the table.

In 1970 NSF allocated approximately \$120,000,000, or 27% of its total budget, for the support of science education. During 1971 this figure has slipped to \$100,600,000, or 19.6%; and it now appears that NSF's 1972 expenditures for science education will be \$77,300,000, or 12.4% of the total budget. Analysis of the data reveals that these decreases have occurred during a period when the total NSF budget will have increased by more than \$180,000,000.

The report from which these figures were taken also states that "approximately 7,700 faculty scientists and about 7,200 graduate science students" will be involved in research efforts from a budget of \$257,800,000 for the support of scientific research projects. We must, in all candor, ask ourselves how many manhours this budget will remove from the undergraduate science courses in the 450 institutions NSF hopes to support in fiscal 1972. It appears that while science classrooms, packed with hundreds of disenchanting young people, go wanting for good teachers and smaller classes, the National Science Foundation will continue to retreat further from student needs.

Over the past 15 years NSF, along with the other federal science funding agencies, has provided salaries to keep college and university faculty members and their graduate students in research laboratories and out of the classroom. Teaching was left to those graduate students who could not get a research grant; and besides, what graduate student would want an \$1,800 teaching assistantship when he could receive a \$2,400 research assistantship? During this period science faculties shifted their allegiance from institutional programs and meeting the needs of the large numbers of students flocking to their classes to meeting the requirements of the granting agencies for research funds.

Today thousands of scientists are unemployed, and I cannot help but wonder where those 7,200 graduate students NSF hopes to train in 1972 plan to go to work in 1973 and 1974. For each college teaching vacancy today there are dozens of applicants with extensive research experience and little or no teaching experience.

One serious aspect of this problem of too many scientists is related to the lack of meaningful communication between science and society. If NSF is interested in producing a scientifically literate society perhaps it should start to provide incentives that would attract our best scientific minds to the nation's classrooms, rather than continuing to isolate them from undergraduates.

The Editor