

## THE ARTIFICIAL EARTH SATELLITE

THE fact that the U.S.S.R. has been the first to launch successfully an artificial satellite cannot enhance Russia's political prestige, for fundamentally politics had nothing to do with this scientific achievement. We have no reason for believing that Russian politicians are any more scientifically trained than they are in the West. Neither does this brilliant piece of technology necessarily enhance the status of Russian scientists in the world of science, except perhaps among those who subscribe to the worship of priority in the world of scientific discovery. Moreover, reports that some people in the Western democracies, especially the United States, are expressing fear for the future of world peace as a consequence of this recent news should be treated with the contempt that it merits. This hysterical reaction is a clear symptom of the disease of lack of appreciation of scientific knowledge or its significance, from which many people are suffering to-day.

Apart from demonstrating the efficiency and high standard of scientific research and technical achievement in the U.S.S.R. (a demonstration unnecessary to men of science, but possibly of use to many ill-informed politicians), the most significant feature of this incident is that it reveals how much Russian scientists enjoy financial support, privilege and prestige to a degree much higher than is accorded to their colleagues in most of the democratic countries.

It is not good for science in general that the Russian achievement should be looked upon as a political set-back for the West; neither should it be credited to the U.S.S.R. that she has won a race against the United States. Science flourishes in an atmosphere of encouragement and respect; racing for priority does little or no good. The search for the truth in its own materialist way should be the main objective of science; that is, dispassionate discovery. But in an age of science and technology our men of science must play a more active part in controlling and guiding the social applications of their work. This cannot be done while men of science are treated by too many people in authority as hens in a battery—producing 'eggs' for the use of other people and with little or no say in their disposition.

Accusations have already been made against Western politicians and Service authorities that they have impeded scientific research. This may well be true. It is certainly true that Service 'brass hats' tend to condescend to scientists, sometimes even treat them with contempt; this is due to their lack of knowledge of science. (It is reported that on hearing the news of the Russian achievement, one senior man in the Services retorted that anybody could launch a hunk of iron into outer space.

A member of Parliament commented: "If the Russians like to squander untold millions of pounds on moonshine, then that's their funeral". The sincere man of science is dedicated to his work, and in such a vocation encouragement and, above all, respect must be accorded to him by all and sundry. This cannot be, however, in a community where the attitude towards science is one of using it as a tool for political and diplomatic intrigue. Neither can men of science be expected to give of their best when they are treated with condescension or are controlled by people who do not understand what they are controlling.

Often enough recently we have listened to pleas that men of science, especially those in industry and government concerns, should be able to see clearly before them a seat in the board room or among the hierarchy of councils; and, indeed, some of our most successful industrial firms now ensure that the scientists on whom they depend so much shall be offered all the prospects that any other efficient man may reasonably expect.

But among the lay public, this attitude is still very much lacking. Indeed, there are still too many people prone to condemn the scientists for all the world's ills and far too many who openly boast of their lack of knowledge of science and its social applications. It should be no cause for wonder that there is a shortage of scientists or that there is so much apathy and lack of interest in things scientific in any community where the most important schools are encouraging the majority of their best scholars to take up politics, diplomacy, business, etc., or even enter the Church, with a background of political history, economics and the arts but with little or no training in scientific method or appreciation. Perhaps the democratic countries, especially Britain, will show signs of improvement and ability to take their lead in world affairs when the superior attitude of politicians and Service authorities is undermined or modified, when more headmasters in our schools are expected to be trained scientists rather than historians and classicists, and, above all, when the public and the popular Press ceases to look upon scientists as (to use the all-too-common ugly appellations) 'back-room boys' or 'boffins'.

There is no such thing as communist science as distinct from capitalist or democratic science; but there are Russian scientists, and some of them are to be congratulated on this recent brilliant addition to knowledge and achievement. In other countries it might now well be conceded that men of science should be given every conceivable encouragement, which includes higher status and respect; and those States which subject scientific research to false economies should deeply ponder the wisdom of such a policy. (See also p. 734 of this issue.)