

## 50 YEARS OF CURRENT SCIENCE—GLEANINGS

[Our editorial on "The Scheme Worker" reproduced below was published three and a half decades ago in the September 1947 issue of *Current Science*.

Schemes of investigation have come to stay; in fact, they now form an important aspect of the country's science. There are today several agencies which fund such schemes: CSIR, ICAR, ICMR, UGC, DST, INSA, ISRO, Defence Ministry and Electronics Commission to mention only a few of the important ones. Schemes bring live problems for solution; they also bring welcome additions to the working expenses for our scientists; and they bring in groups of young scientific workers, trained to work under a time target and a pre-set goal. Such men are valuable. In the matter of career planning stressed in our editorial of 1947, some developments have taken place, largely on the initiative of individual institutions and agencies. We feel there is a case for a focus of national attention on the total problem of scheme workers and their role and place in the country's science—their career planning, continuity of service, terminal benefits etc., all this, of course, after "having sifted the grain from chaff" as our earlier editorial rightly put it. These and such other matters, we feel should be debated in the country's highest scientific counsels.]

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### THE SCHEME WORKER

THE establishment of the Imperial (now Indian) Council of Agricultural Research in the thirties marked the realisation of the grave backwardness of Indian agriculture and the lack of systematic effort at tackling problems peculiar to the indigenous plant-industry. The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research was its counterpart, started during the war, to answer the growing needs of Indian industry. The Indian Research Fund Association, a similar body dealing with the health and nutrition of the people, has been in existence for a much longer period.

These organisations sort out and allot for solution specific problems, in the form of *Schemes of Investigation*, to qualified men to be worked out either in the Council's or other laboratories in the country—all, on the advice of experts in the respective fields. The Scheme Worker can be defined as a trained worker with a set problem, determined to find a solution in a limited period of time, and receiving emoluments generally more than a stipendiary and less than a permanent staff member. Such employment of workers, as conditions of service now stand, involves no obligation on the part of the Councils to ensure continuity and security of employment to the workers, irrespective of the outcome of investigations entrusted to them. This is, to say the least, hard on the workers. In such an atmosphere the worker will have to be either on the look out for fresh problems for *schemes* that "appeal" to the Councils or for permanent posts

which he must need secure before he exceeds the official age bar. This state of constant anxiety, it will be appreciated, is not exactly conducive to high morale resulting in the best output—either in quality or quantity—of scientific research. For, the most successful and lasting solutions and discoveries have got to be backed by years of concentration on specialised fields of investigation. The hunt for new schemes and lucrative employment in any field, on the other hand, cannot but fritter away the enthusiasm and collected experience of young scientists who would, given the chance, willingly work for Science and Country. Instances are common of promising workers who had to enter into routine non-technical professions merely for want of encouraging scope in *schemes*—a waste we could ill-afford at the moment. By this, we should not, however, like to be taken to imply that this system has not been a success. On the contrary, it has to its credit the large success of the war effort and many an innovation and invention useful for improvements in agriculture, dairying, industry, health and epidemiology. But we should like to emphasise that the success has been in spite of the none-too encouraging rewards from the promising results of schemes.

It must, however, be said for the Indian Councils that the funds at their command have not been so munificent and their experience so ripe as to expect flawless organisation and administration in these matters. So far, they have been more or less make-shift

arrangements. But it is now quite clear that each of these Councils—and more that are to come—need a standing army of trained scientists each with a specific branch of applied science for his life-work. If we are, therefore, to expect efficiency and loyalty from those who would devote themselves to fruitful careers of scientific research in the service of the Councils—and, therefore, ultimately of the nation—we cannot grudge security of employment and fair wages in return.

To plead in this strain for the Scheme Workers is not to invite the Councils to offer every entrant a sinecure. For, we admit, it is not given to every college graduate to become a successful scientist endowed with an analytical research mentality, no more than for every paint-dauber to become an accomplished

artist. The *scheme* will, therefore, have its place as a period of training and trial under a critical teacher. And this period could be reckoned as a continuation of the academic training of the candidate. But, having sifted the grain from chaff, fair and encouraging conditions of service must be offered to the worker.

We may venture to suggest that this is a subject that could be taken up by the newly formed Association of Scientific Workers with the Councils of Research. We have reason to hope that the Government will, both in the interest of rapid development of the country and of justice to the Scheme Worker, generously treat the scientists, on whose contentment and enthusiasm depends to a degree the pace of material progress of the nation.

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