

Thoughts about the Nature of an Effective Home Base

The objective of the study we were requested to conduct was to examine the bodies that serve as the base point - and support point - for the scientific attaché networks in several countries: their nature, location in the administration, method of operating and clientele. The countries were chosen not at random, but on the basis of hypotheses about ways in which they resembled the situation in Canada. The idea was to see whether some lessons could not be drawn from foreign experiences with a view to making adjustments to the Canadian system.

Defining the Task

Before considering the effectiveness of the various home bases and the factors determining that effectiveness, we must clarify what "effectiveness" means in this context. The effectiveness of a home base can be evaluated only in terms of the objective of the system in general, since it is simply part of the machinery of that system. Thus it is important to know which of the functions usually assigned to the STAs are considered priority in a given country: the diplomatic function? administering co-operation agreements? collecting information? what type of information, and for whom? Those priorities are determined not through "scientific" analysis but by making political decisions. The question of clientele is also a matter of political decision: is the STA system primarily to serve the foreign policy apparatus? the government administrations? the domestic industries? There can be no question of carrying out a comparative evaluation of the merits of that type of decision in this paper. We have already pointed out elsewhere that the systems in many countries reflect the desire - an unrealistic one - to have their STAs and the home base perform all those functions at the same time and with the same degree of effectiveness, but we have recently observed a tendency to give priority to activities that have direct benefit for domestic industrial strength: the ability to innovate, to produce and to export. For the home bases that policy translates into activities for channelling, processing, and if necessary "creating" information, whether that information is descriptions of products or processes or opportunities for contact and co-operation, identification of gaps in the market, analyses of trends, etc. If we assume that in Canada the desire to make the scientific attachés' work more effective follows that same direction, it will be necessary not only to do a comparative study of the organization and method of operation of the various home bases, but also to consider the difference in the needs they attempt to meet.

Needs

In other words, we must consider how the industrial sector in each country tries to keep informed of what is happening - and what is available - beyond its national boundaries, and to what extent industry finds it desirable to turn to the government for assistance. Apparently it is only in exceptional cases that the STAs' services are considered particularly effective in providing information on leading-edge processes or products, because of both the prohibitive degree of