

Influencing Governments*

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INTRODUCTION

How can we influence governments? Briefly, unless we have the good fortune to catch senior ministers in bed with someone other than their wives, or molesting small boys in the bushes, the answer is, I am afraid, — with great difficulty!

I assume that I have been asked to speak first in this session so that I might tell you what in IUPAC's view the chemical community should be doing to influence governments worldwide and what IUPAC might already be doing or planning to do. To influence a government, to get it to act in one's particular interest, is hard enough and to attempt to do so with any hope of success needs substantial resources. To influence several, or indeed most, to act in unison is clearly even harder and needs even more resources. For that reason IUPAC has not as yet formally thought to address the problem although many of us have thought about it and have spoken about it informally. So the news I shall outline are my own although they will have been influenced by my knowledge of IUPAC affairs and also, and more particularly, by my more direct involvement with trying to influence the UK government in various capacities and over many years in the Royal Society of Chemistry.

Although IUPAC has not tried to influence governments directly, the results of much of its work is of use to those who are trying to do so, but I shall come to that later. What I would like to do now, is first to ask what it is that we want governments to do for chemistry and then to discuss strategy and tactics, — how we might get, and indeed have got, national governments to understand our needs and even to do something to meet them.

Finally, I shall discuss the question whether some form of international effort is possible or desirable.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR GOVERNMENTS TO DO?

What do we want government to do to help chemistry? — chemistry that is as a subject, as part of our culture as

well as that tangible and vital result of applying chemical knowledge, the Chemical Industry. In my view our needs can be summarised under three broad, interrelated heads.

First, we want governments to recognize the vitally important contribution by chemistry to the health, wealth and standard of life of the nation; something few of them appear to do. And this is strange for in the more developed nations particularly, there is little that their peoples everyday eat, wear, use or travel in that has not felt the touch of the chemist's hand. Their people's health depends on chemistry as does the health of their environment. That being so one would expect that the subject and those that practise it would be held in esteem by government and by the general public. But as we all know, although the level of esteem may vary from country to country, it is lower than it deserves to be because not only does government and public not know and appreciate what chemistry does for them, but also because they both associate chemists and chemistry principally with the few and inevitable shortcomings and unforeseen side reactions which accompany any human endeavour; in our case the accidental release of chemical products by leakage, spillage or carelessness which, whether harmful or not, are invariably looked upon as dangerous, poisonous or noxious — the unqualified noun, chemical, has disappeared from the general vocabulary.

This is a problem too well known to you to need elaboration and the solution can be easily stated, education and communication, but how difficult to bring about. It is difficult for several reasons but I feel that the principal one is insufficient understanding of science in the first place by members of governments of whatever structure, and following inevitably from that of the man and woman in the street, educated and brought up in a culture which governments play a major part in providing and cultivating.

So, our second request to governments, follows briefly and simply, help us to restore and maintain chemistry's good name.

As it is the chemical industries that supply so many of the products which underpin our health, prosperity and standard of life, our third request to governments is to give those industries encouragement and incentives to help them to continue to do so. From the aspect of prosperity alone, the chemical industries are the principal creators of wealth. In the UK, the contribution of the chemical industries to the balance of payments (cost of exports less cost of imports) in 1992 was GBP 3.4 billions; in the United States in 1991 the corresponding figure was USD 18.8 billions. Chemical industries need not only a favourable image but also the means to trade efficiently and competitively both today and tomorrow, and it is here that governments seem to fail us. Their vision so often seems to extend only into the near future, in fact to the date of the next election, when what will determine whether or not they stay in office will be the money which is then in the pockets of the population. So resources tend to be devoted to measures which will ensure that there is enough in those pockets to produce a reassuring jingle at election time.

HOW MIGHT GOVERNMENTS HELP THE CHEMICAL INDUSTRIES?

Some of the most obvious ways in which governments might help the chemical industries are:

1. Provide the educational incentives and opportunities to secure a stream of young people adequately educated and trained for the variety of roles needed by those industries whether it be in sales, production, management or research.

The initial need is to awaken children at an early age to the wonder of science to such an extent that they are willing as they progress through the grades to take on the task of understanding the difficult and not obvious concepts of science; concepts which appear more removed from what mankind is to man than those of the softer subjects, history, literature, geography. Meeting this need is a formidable task and one that can only be accomplished gradually, but the need to provide the resources and incen-

tives required to give an adequate training in research when these children reach university can be met quickly by sufficient funding and requires us to persuade those in power that we, the chemistry community, can use the money more effectively than can those who are in competition with us for a share in a budget which, though it might be large, is finite; not easy when the competition comes from within the politically sensitive sectors of health care, defence and support for a growing population of retired people.

2. Providing the resources for a good post-graduate training in research is only one of the reasons why chemistry and the chemical industries need a strong science base in universities and institutions devoted to long-term, basic research. Because research techniques have become more advanced and physically more complex, the annual increase in the cost of maintaining the science base is greater than the usual measure of the increase in cost of living. However, one is fortunate if the increase in government support is in line with the usual measure, more often the increase is less. It is something which is of concern to chemists, and indeed all scientists in the UK, but universally, governments need to provide more realistic sums of money for long term research which always builds our knowledge but also, every now and again, results in a discovery which adds substantially to our well-being and prosperity. Ernest Eliel has recently told the story of some of these, Nylon, Teflon, Cortisone, DNA, in "Science and Serendipity", an ACS publication.

HOW DO WE PERSUADE GOVERNMENTS TO DO THESE THINGS?

Given that the above are some of the things we want governments to do, how do we set about the difficult task of getting them to take them up? I am taking it as axiomatic that we produce our case plainly, clearly and briefly with convincing supporting evidence.

Although the job of influencing several may be harder than convincing just one, the same principles must surely apply.

We have first to win their confidence and goodwill; to make friends of them if possible.

Secondly, we must take into

account their difficulties, and the restrictions on their freedom to act.

Thirdly, we have to remember the prejudices inherent from their backgrounds and training. We cannot talk to them in the way we talk to fellow scientists.

Fourthly, be prepared "to make haste slowly", immediate converts are only made from the ranks of the naive and uninformed as a rule; but as the time members of government can give to any issue or individual is limited and usually short, a nice balance of judgement is needed.

Lastly, we have to make them think it was really their idea, especially if there is advantage to them in promoting it. As the wise, but somewhat cynical, man said, you can get anything done as long as you don't want the credit for it.

So how to put these rules into effect? An obvious and important step is to give attention to your hospitality; obvious because the good meal, and fine wines liberally dispensed in order to make friends, and it must be admitted to influence them into granting favours possibly in the future but in the case of the candle-lit dinner for two, more immediately and enjoyably — has been practised since time immemorial.

In the Royal Society of Chemistry our hospitality to ministers and other influential people has taken the form of light but tasteful luncheons. We have found these busy people are more willing to give up an hour or so of their time in the middle of the day than several hours over dinner in the evening. To be effective these occasions need to be planned and managed but without appearing to be.

In the early days we found that although we and our guests enjoyed it all, the relaxed atmosphere and pauses for service led to only a fraction of our concerns being discussed. So now we have a preluncheon meeting to decide the number and order of matters we wish to discuss, the time to be given to each and who will raise them. It is then the chairman's, usually the president's, task to tactfully move through the matters in timely fashion, a delicate task but made easier if he explains to the guest beforehand our wish to make the most of his valuable time.

Although the willingness of ministers to listen varies, we have found that most pay close attention, nod at the right moment and make notes on pad or nap-

kin. We never knew what they do with them afterwards, but in a few instances we have been called subsequently to the minister's office for a further discussion which has usually brought results.

I will not go into detail about other means whereby the Royal Society of Chemistry keeps in touch with ministers, members of parliament and the appropriate parts of the Civil Service because Dr. Tom Inch, Secretary General of the Society, will be doing this later, but I would emphasize that the intention underlying them all is to make ourselves known, liked and respected as a source of information and help in all things chemical.

Our parliamentary office, who is the son of a very well known member of parliament, has put these principles into such effective action that he is able to move freely and in friendly fashion among members of all parliamentary parties. We seek to provide members of parliament with up to date briefings on current issues involving chemistry and to put them in touch with the most active of the Society members in their locality through the so-called Link Scheme.

We have more formal links with a member of each main parliamentary party, our Parliamentary Advisers, to give us early warning of anything going through Parliament which has chemical consequences so that we may provide them with suitable material and views to feed into parliamentary deliberations at whatever level is appropriate. One is a qualified chemist, the other a lawyer, and over the years both have become friends with us and each other, and are now very knowledgeable about the Society and the world of chemistry.

Finally, we have good friends in the so-called second chamber, The House of Lords; two are past presidents of the Society.

I would think however, that in the means of keeping in touch with and trying to influence members of government and their permanent staff, the ACS is in the forefront. During my several visits to their Washington headquarters I have been impressed by the resources in both time and money devoted to keeping in touch with the White House. Dr Helen Free will be speaking on the subject later perhaps, but an example of their efforts is the Federal Policy Agenda which in its own words biennially sets out to Focus and Establish, Help Inform, Provide a

Framework. It also lists the many ACS policy statements, thirty five in all, on education, risk assessment, pollution, patent laws and energy.

But possibly more effective than these more-or-less formal methods of approach is the "old boy network"; the ties that bind together people who went to the same school, the same university, served in the same regiment and so on. Chemistry needs "old boys" in government who are trained chemists and who have experience in chemistry. Sadly there are few in the United Kingdom, which raises the question why do not more scientists enter politics? The answer must lie in the fact that someone who by natural inclination and education wishes to take up a calling in which rationality, objectivity and independency of thought are at a premium is unlikely to be drawn towards one in which these seem to be at a discount.

"Get thee glass eyes
And like the scurvy politician, seem
To see the things that thou dost not."

Nevertheless, until more chemists enter politics we shall be at a disadvantage compared with lawyers, doctors and financiers. Perhaps in addition to degrees in Chemistry and language, Chemistry and Economics we need them in Chemistry and Politics! It seems unlikely that the situation will change much but in time we at least may see more politicians who have been educated to understand something of the philosophy, methods and strength of the scientific method.

WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED SO FAR?

Let us echo Little Peterkin in the Victorian poet Robert Southey's poem "The Battle of Blenheim",

And everybody praised the Duke
Who this great fight did win,
"But what good came of it at last?"
Quoth little Peterkin.
"Why that I cannot tell" said he,
"But t'was a famous victory".

What good at last has come from efforts to influence governments? It must come as no surprise given the nature and difficulty of the task, that definable and specific gains have been small. It is true of the Royal Society of

Chemistry's efforts and I believe of those of the American Chemical Society. Nevertheless, gains there have been and I would expect these to increase as governments learn to trust us more and see the strength of our case. Dr Tom Inch will have more to say about our successes but I can clearly recall three. 1. In the early days we succeeded in modifying legislation which, if passed in its original form, would have required professional chemists to join one of the very large trades union which had methods and objectives not at all consistent with ours. 2. What we were able to tell the then Minister of Education and Science about the consequences of the shortage of trained chemistry teachers led to his increasing the grants to chemistry graduates going on for a year's teacher training. 3. Our submission about the effect on research and the long term health of ICI if it were taken over by Hanson, was a significant element in the government's decision to disallow the take over.

Apart from specific successes one hopes that awareness of the importance of chemistry and the chemical industries and the problems it faces has been improved and that our relationship with government has been strengthened. The Royal Society of Chemistry can at least take comfort from seeing up to ten references each year to their evidence and opinions in Hansard, the official record of the proceedings of the British Parliament.

CAN ANYTHING USEFULLY BE DONE AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL?

It should now be evident that influencing a government is hard, slow and needs substantial resources — and is something each country must continue to try to do, but is an international effort practicable and if so, is it desirable?; and is there a place for IUPAC?; could it act as a focus?

I must at this point expand on my earlier statement that although IUPAC has not formally considered whether influencing governments should be on its agenda, it provides substantial help to those who have it on theirs through its work to standardize, regulate and codify matters chemical, the results of which are published regularly in the scientific press and in IUPAC'S own books and

other publications. Its position is made clear in the opening paragraphs of its formal description in the IUPAC Handbook.

"Founded in 1919, the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC) is a voluntary, non-governmental, non-profit association of National Adhering Organizations presently representing the chemists of 43 member countries. In addition, there are 13 Observer Countries, 37 Associated Organizations and 160 Company Associates.

The objectives of the Union are:

(i) to promote continuing cooperation among the chemists of the member countries;

(ii) to study topics of international importance to pure and applied chemistry which need regulation, standardization, or codification;

(iii) to cooperate with other international organizations which deal with topics of a chemical nature;

(iv) to contribute to the advancement of pure and applied chemistry in all its aspects.

In pursuing these objectives the Union observes a basic policy of political nondiscrimination and affirms the rights of chemists of any country to adhere to or to associate with international activity in the field of chemistry without regard to race, religion, or political philosophy".

Its conferences under the heading "Chemistry Research Applied to World Needs" (CHEMRAWN) are especially relevant. The seventh and eighth in the series were "The Chemistry of the Atmosphere" Baltimore 1991 and "Chemistry and Sustainable Development" Moscow 1992. These attract wide audiences and at the final session a set of conclusions recommendations and future actions to be taken is agreed. After the Baltimore and Moscow conferences these were sent to the governments of the United States and of Russia respectively and widely circulated to others. Particularly relevant also are the workshops on safety and environmental protective measures in production and research organized by the Committee on Chemistry and Industry (COCI) and by the work of the Task Force on Scientific Aspects of the Destruction of Chemical Warfare Agents.

But to return to our main concern, attempting to influence governments face to face and the merits of mounting

an international effort. The advantages of exchanging information between countries, the need for agreed data, about the effects of chemicals on the environment for example is obvious as is the consequent benefit to those directly discussing such issues with government. It is happening through conferences and publications as well as through cooperative international research; is there a need for more direct action? Would a worldwide forum which produced regular, agreed statements supported by internationally accepted data quicken and ease understanding between governments and the chemistry community?

All chemists and chemistry suffer from the general ignorance about what we do, but it is the chemical industries which suffer most keenly and who are seen as the principal villains of the piece. Lack of understanding and exaggerated fears can lead to excessive and wasteful regulation which is compounded if there is no uniformity of regulation and practice between countries. In order to increase such uniformity and to ease similar difficulties chemical industries have set up regional organizations such as the

European Chemical Industry Council (CEFIC). More recently the International Council of Chemical Associations (ICCA) has come into being to consider the concerns of chemical industries worldwide. At present it is an informal organization with as yet no permanent staff.

Among its members are CEFIC, the Chemical Manufacturers' Associations of the United States and of Canada, the Chemical Industries Association of the United Kingdom and their equivalents in Japan and Australia. But because these organizations are set up and controlled by those who in the eyes of the public, and often of government, are themselves the accused, their pronouncements are likely to be greeted by a comment similar to that made famously by Mandy Rice-Davis "Well he would (say that) wouldn't he?". The same could not so readily be said of pronouncements coming from an organization with a more neutral stance, an organization concerned with all aspects of chemistry and having in it chemists of all types, academic, industrial and governmental, — an international counterpart in fact to the national chemical societies. IUPAC by its nature and by

its stated objectives could well be a place for it. To be effective, it would need strong financial support from the chemical industries for it has always been a feature of the Union that its members not only give freely of their time but also obtain substantial financial support for their work from external agencies, consequently its financial resources are slender.

I have the uneasy feeling that all this has been what my old headmaster would have called a laboured demonstration of the obvious, but hope it serves to promote discussion. I leave you with the hope that even though our efforts may not lead to us chemists being counted amongst the angels that at the least we shall be looked on much as we used to when I first became one, as well intentioned, slightly dotty people who look as if they make their own clothes.

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