Impressions of the WMO Congress

Inclusion of an AMS adviser in recent United States delegations to the WMO Congress has afforded a unique opportunity for AMS contact with the international community and a broad range of problems, many of which are reflected by our own Society's structure and activities. At the Eighth World Meteorological Congress (reported on pp. 1340–1342 in this issue of the *BULLETIN*) this representative, earlier without direct knowledge of the workings of the WMO, found the experience valuable.

In spirit, the WMO was born at an international conference in Brussels in 1853. This was inspired by heightened realizations, during the expansion of maritime commerce arising from the Industrial Revolution, of the benefits of improved knowledge of winds, storms, and ocean currents to safety and economy of passage. The First International Meteorological Congress, at Vienna in 1873, established a permanent body for international cooperation, with the concept that it should comprise directors of meteorological services who would be in control of the organization. The International Meteorological Organization (IMO) became the WMO, an intergovernmental agency of the UN, in 1951.

The quadrennial Congress brings together representatives of Member States and Territories to adopt technical regulations and to fix the policy, program, and budget of the WMO. The Executive Committee supervises implementation and takes necessary actions in interim years. Six Regional Associations coordinate activities and ensure protection of regional interests through recommendations to the Congress and the Executive Committee. Eight Technical Commissions recommend upon matters of observations, communications and data processing, and applications of meteorology. The Secretariat, in Geneva, carries out administration and technical studies, prepares specialized publications, and serves as a link not only among meteorological services but also with UN organizations and others in such fields as world food production, natural disasters, environmental protection, water resource planning, and transportation. Through multilateral agreements under a Voluntary Cooperation Programme, Members provide assistance in education, technical advice by seconded experts, and equipment. The UN Development Programme also contributes to WMO Training Centres and the strengthening of meteorological and hydrological services in individual countries. Several hundred publications, originating

from WMO bodies or invited experts on a rich variety of topics, are listed in the *Catalogue of Publications of the WMO, 1951–1977*.

This observer found the process enlightening, and was thankful that it was in the hands of delegates from countries small and large who were, through experience and diligent preparation, well informed on a complex array of issues developed in a relentless flow of documents that began long before the Congress. Representations compelling in their logic, often tinged with humorous riposte, enlivened the debates and made the long sessions tolerable. This observer came away feeling that, while indeed there were abundant dissenting views, a spirit of cooperation and goodwill prevailed.

Certainly deficiencies did not escape comment. Notably, while the successes of satellites, buoys, and other programs were lauded, there was dismay over the serious shortfall of surface and upper-air observations and communications in some regions and remedial actions were proposed. Members from some developing countries perceived their needs as suffering in competition with large budget items, and made eloquent pleas that training of personnel and broadening of their meteorological services should not be curtailed. While some proposals were regarded as low in universal urgency, others, such as the combat against desertification, were seen as common to developing and more technologically advanced countries.

Attacks upon the budget at the outset were a source of wonder, but it quickly developed that there were motivations beyond tight national budget constraints for WMO contributions. More significantly, the purpose was to hold in check commitments of money and manpower by the meteorological services outside the WMO budget but necessary to support programs agreed upon. Particular enthusiasm was devoted to slashing the very numerous meetings proposed, on grounds that attendance would be an insupportable burden for the national services, diminishing their effectiveness. This observer's impression is that common sense prevailed, and that while not all participants were satisfied, a balance was reached between the needs for operations and research, and the resources available to meet these needs.

One must admire the achievements of the WMO as a cooperative international enterprise. During the 24 years Dr. D. A. Davies served as Secretary-General, responsibilities of the WMO grew commensurately with our science and its services. The manifold activities bear the imprint of the man whose name has, to many, become synonymous with that of the Organization.—*Chester W. Newton, President*