

Comments and Communications

The Civil Liberties of Scientists Report

The resolution of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists (*Science*, 1950, 111, 638) bearing upon the report of the AAAS Special Committee on Civil Liberties of Scientists makes certain inferences which should not be allowed to pass without correction. The AAPG resolution reads

The AAPG believes that all loyal citizens of the nation, whatever their category, must be united without reservation in support of the measures deemed necessary by the Federal authorities for the security and defense of the nation. We believe that no loyal citizen, whether scientist or not, should object to investigation of his loyalty.

The Special Committee report (*Science*, 1949, 110, 177) reads

No one doubts the importance of faithful discharge of duty by public officials. No one questions the propriety of the government's demanding that its employees be loyal to their jobs and to the democratic institutions they serve.

The implication that the Special Committee deprecated the importance of "loyalty" is unfounded. The Committee did question the propriety or possibility of attempting to ascertain the reality of a government employee's loyalty by

... inquiring into his supposed thoughts and attitudes, which are established in large part by imputing to him the beliefs of his associates.

The AAPG resolution furthermore confuses "loyalty" and "security" investigations and requirements. The Special Committee dealt at great length in its report on the proper distinctions to be made. In its conclusions, that committee said regarding security control

No matter how the area of secrecy may be delimited, there will undoubtedly remain some matters of scientific cognizance which should be kept confidential. So long as national policy dictates that secrecy be observed, the reliability of persons to whom these matters are entrusted must be assured; hence inquiries into the character and attitudes of these persons are warranted.

If national as well as individual interests are to be protected, however, improvements must be achieved in the policies and procedures of our present security clearance programs as they affect scientists who will be entrusted with classified information.

The report was perfectly clear in recognizing proper areas for secrecy, in which security requirements necessitated careful personnel screening. However, it urged strongly that the areas of secrecy, and thus the number of persons concerned with confidential data in science, be reduced to a minimum for a number of cogent reasons.

The AAPG resolution contains the sentence

Therefore, although secrecy may for a time impede our scientific progress, we shall abide by such security requirements.

It may be of interest to point out that the Special Committee report said on this score

We endorse the statement of the President's Scientific Research Board, which in its 1947 Report on Science and Public Policy said: "Strict military security in the narrow sense is not entirely consistent with the broader requirements of national security. To be secure as a Nation we must maintain a climate conducive to the full flowering of free inquiry. However important secrecy about military weapons may be, the fundamental discoveries of researchers must circulate freely to have full beneficial effect. . . . Security regulations, therefore, should be applied only when strictly necessary and then limited to specific instruments, machines or processes. They should not attempt to cover basic principles of fundamental knowledge."

In a final flourish the petroleum geologists say rather boastfully

We take pride in our readiness, cheerfully and wholeheartedly, to prove our loyalty and patriotism in case of inquiry.

It should be noted that the important point is not personal preference but national welfare. The question at issue is not the pride of anyone or any group in their readiness to submit to investigation and to approve of secrecy in science. The question is really that of how the best interests of American democracy can be served. It was gratifying to the members of the Special Committee on Civil Liberties of Scientists of the AAAS that its report was endorsed by a 4 to 1 majority of the AAAS Council mail vote. Every dissenting council member had a chance to be heard. A large number of scientists voluntarily wrote to the committee endorsing its conclusions.

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On Political Oaths and Affidavits

There is a new and dangerous trend in our society toward extending the meaning of necessary and well-established safeguards in selecting public employees. The tendency is now toward laws requiring employees to sign oaths or affidavits of their political beliefs. To help maintain the sanity and integrity of our democratic form of government, and to preserve the independent spirit of inquiry necessary to science, all individual scientists should examine sharply the restrictive phraseology of such legislation, however innocuous it may seem. This has been demonstrated recently in a shocking way.

Radio operators for the Merchant Marine are licensed by the Coast Guard under a procedure established long ago by Congress. The 80th Congress renewed this law (Public Law 525), which states that the Coast Guard must be satisfied that the applicant's

... character, habits of life, and physical condition are such as to authorize the belief that he is a suitable and safe person to be entrusted with the powers and duties of such a station. . . .