



Rededication to Liberal Decency

THERE is at present a sickness in our country—a sickness of rumor and anxiety, of suspicion and distrust, and, at its worst, of fear and tragedy. In part, this sickness is the result of overemphasis on caution for the past rather than on constructive courage with respect to the future. In part, it is an anti-intellectualism, a strange and dangerous lack of faith in scholarly competence. In part, it is, we all realize, the misguided groping of sincere persons who really want to be good citizens but who have been misled as to what good citizenship is. In its worst part it is the horrid result of political pressure, of personal selfishness, and of the pathological arrogance of demagogues with small and nasty minds.

One of the most dangerous and wicked results of this disease is the destruction of confidence—confidence that honest, capable, and devoted service will be rewarded as such; confidence that governmental promises can be trusted to be stable, confidence that the precious Anglo-Saxon tradition of due process will be observed.

This sickness attacks our society at all levels and in all fields of activity. Science is in a position to be particularly aware of the dangers in this sickness, but science asks for no special privilege or protection. Science voices its concern but primarily because the problem is a universal one.

Many of the dread disorders of men's bodies involve the production of antibodies which furnish future immunity from the disease. But a most irrational and discouraging fact about our society's present disease is that apparently one can never stop worrying, can never be sure that the disease will not strike again and again and again.

Some of us—partly only because of the accidental

character of our activities, partly because we attest to our liberalism in more discreet (or should I say more timid) ways—have so far avoided this disease. But no one of us is immune.

The time has been reached, many of us are convinced, when it is no longer defensible to fail to take a stand. We must use all our wits and patience, all our reasonableness and courage, to see to it that we take a really sensible, constructive stand, and in particular that we do not fight fire with fire. Although there often is much incentive to protest without restraint, we must not do this. Freedom is too precious to deserve rash or stupid support.

There is some encouraging evidence that this past year may have seen the worst of this disease. There are promising signs that at appropriately high levels in our government a concern now exists to improve the whole loyalty-security-secrecy setup. If this is in fact done with promptness and candor, then we can hope that the disease will also begin to wane in other places and in other fields of interest.

So there is a chance that, at this particular session of the AAAS, we are actually celebrating the upturn, the overdue rededication to liberal decency. If so, then there is a poetic appropriateness to this occasion. It is my very great pleasure, and my special honor, to present to you Edward Uhler Condon, the retiring president.

WARREN WEAVER, *President*
American Association for the Advancement of Science

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