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Society in the Scientific Revolution

The recent political campaign for the Presidency of the United States was noteworthy for the initial appearance of a technical issue as a major feature. The problem of radiation hazard and its relation to tests of the H-bomb became a political football, but the game appears to have ended with the political campaign.

This situation is a symptom and a result of a new social revolution, the Scientific Revolution, even greater in its effect than the Industrial Revolution. The health, longevity, comfort, and security of mankind already have been markedly affected by the application of scientific discoveries and information. Much greater changes seem imminent in the near future and at a continually accelerated pace.

The new revolution can be the source of good or evil, according to the use made of these discoveries and to the facility with which society and science recognize and adjust to the changing conditions. The proper functioning of the democratic process could greatly ease the tensions and requires that society give both the natural and the social sciences a place in its councils at all levels of the social structure. In turn, scientific organizations may be obliged to accept a social responsibility commensurate with the importance of the social effect of science.

These conclusions are some of those indicated by the Interim-Committee on the Social Aspects of Science, authorized by the AAAS Council in December 1955 at Atlanta, Georgia. They are contained in a provisional report entitled "Society in the Scientific Revolution," which has been distributed to council members. A companion resolution will be presented at the coming council meeting.

The committee believes that society and science are now so intermeshed and interacting that scientific groups must reevaluate their traditional "isolationist" positions and accept the place in the democratic process demanded by the current importance of science.

The matter is deeply serious and involves a profound change in the attitudes and actions of both scientists and nonscientists. The committee requests that AAAS councilors give adequate consideration to the report prior to the council meeting and that the subject be one for profound consideration and discussion by all interested persons. Comments should be sent to the members of the committee in time to be considered before the council meeting.

The report is being submitted with a full realization of its inadequacies but with the belief that these problems must be debated by all citizens, especially scientists.—INTERIM-COMMITTEE ON THE SOCIAL ASPECTS OF SCIENCE: BARRY COMMONER, GABRIEL LASKER, CHAUNCEY D. LEAKE, BENJAMIN WILLIAMS, WARD PIGMAN (*chairman*)