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To the Barricades?

It is probable that none of the events at the New York meeting of the AAAS attracted as much attention as the report of the Interim Committee on the Social Aspects of Science [*Science* 125, 141 (editorial), 143 (25 Jan. 1957)]. The report was reprinted in full in the *New York Times*, and the main recommendations were widely publicized in other newspapers and magazines. In addition, the report inspired much editorial comment.

Here are some of the more favorable attitudes that were expressed about the report: The *Nation* said: "In historical perspective, it may be that the biggest story of 1956 was revealed . . . in the course of the generally sedate proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. . . ." and "What the report seems to be saying is that while the scientist proposes, it is left to the politician to dispose." The *Newsletter* of the Federation of American Scientists said: "The general tenor of the above statement [an excerpt from the report] will raise few eyebrows among FAS members; the crisis referred to has been at the cornerstone of Federation policy for ten years. What gives it significance, and makes it doubly welcome, is its source. . . . The scientific community has long had a social conscience; what is new is that this conscience may now be implemented by the community as a whole." The *New York Times* said: "The Association apparently tends now to act as a public representative of American science and scientists. . . . If done properly, this new role can be a helpful and constructive one. . . . All of us have a vital stake in assuring that our society adjusts properly to the revolutionary impact of scientific advance and to the enormously enhanced importance of scientists as a group."

Others took a more hostile view of the report. The *Indianapolis Star* said: "Another voice may soon be added to the hundreds already clamoring for the exclusive franchise to solve America's problems." In reference to the statement in the report that referred to "the pressing need that scientists concern themselves with social action," the *Star* commented: "Social action, when they put it that way, means political action," and, while granting that scientists have the duty to concern themselves with social problems, added, "but not as a pressure group. . . . Science will get farther in the end if its practitioners refuse to allow one of their greatest professional organizations to become a mere political action committee."

The *Wall Street Journal*, in an editorial entitled "Again the clear call," remarked: "It seems that we have heard all this before. Perhaps it was in the 1930's, when college professors all over the land were hearing the clear call to duty 'to accept the place' demanded by their importance." And, in reference to the committee statement that "scientific organizations may be obliged to accept a social responsibility commensurate with the importance of the social effect of science," the *Journal* said, "A clear call to the political barricades if we ever heard one."

It is well to remember that the Association has moved neither so far nor so fast as most of the comments imply. The Council called for the appointment of a larger committee which is to make a study and then report to the Board of Directors. This action of the Council insures that the important issues raised by the committee will receive careful and deliberate consideration. There is no immediate call to man the barricades, political or otherwise.—G. DuS.