

News and Comment

"Science of Survival": Founding Meeting Proceeds in Confusion and Ends in Bitterness, Chaos

New York. Some 700 persons, most of them scientists and educators, gathered here last Friday to promote the establishment of "a science and a program for human survival." When they adjourned late Sunday afternoon, it was apparent that before their organization—the Congress of Scientists on Survival—could hope to help the world survive, it could profitably employ its talents to assure and justify its own survival.

Simply stated, the congress ended in chaos, producing confusion and bitterness among its participants, and virtually nothing else. Its object, as stated in its literature, was "to utilize the special knowledge of the relevant scientific disciplines in a positive program for world disarmament"; but, as many participants protested, its performance represented nothing but a burlesque of the utilization of science to help solve international problems.

Those who arrived with the expectation that the congress would bear some resemblance to a conventional scientific meeting found instead that it was a magnet for all manner of persons, professional and otherwise, concerned about the East-West conflict. Among the nonscientists was a lady who advised a panel of specialists, "we've had enough research on peace problems; now is the time to put the results in a computer and get the answer." Also present, participating in discussions and offering resolutions, was a dedicated young man, Stephen D. James, who is promoting a voluntary exchange of hostages with the Soviet Union as a step to assure peace. Many things, pro and con, can be said about James's proposal, but scientists who arrived with the impression that a "special knowledge of the relevant scientific disciplines" justified one's participation in the congress

found the background noise from James and others quite disconcerting.

Even more disconcerting for those who mistook the congress for a scientific meeting were proposals that it take positions on such issues as nuclear testing and fallout shelters. Here the split was not between scientists and nonscientists—some of the most eminent scientists supported the proposals—but between those who felt that the state of the world warranted immediate action and those who felt that the congress would undermine its position as a *scientific* organization if it took positions on complex issues without first having conducted relevant investigations. This division widened as the congress proceeded to a final session which the *New York Times* said "plainly confused many of those present," and which the *Washington Post* said "could only be described as confused."

The confused climax was matched by widespread misunderstanding about the origins of the congress. Many persons attending were under the impression that it was an undertaking of the AAAS, a misconception which can be attributed to emphasis on the fact that Chauncey D. Leake, chairman of the meeting, is a former president of the AAAS, plus a congress press release which said the meeting was being held in response to the "call of the AAAS for the establishment of a new collaborative science, the science of human survival." The supposed call of the AAAS was a proposal last December by six members of the AAAS Committee on Science in the Promotion of Human Welfare for the establishment of such a "science," but the proposal still stands as no more than a proposal of the six individuals; the AAAS played no part in the congress; the persons who proposed a "science of survival" to the AAAS had nothing to do with setting up the congress.

The origins of the congress go back to a regional meeting of the American

Association for Social Psychiatry held last November, at which a number of members proposed pulling various scientific disciplines together to form a "science of survival." The AASP showed no interest in attaching its name to the venture, but the original group of individuals proceeded with the project, contacting scientists to get some idea of the probable response. This turned out to be considerable, and it was followed by invitations and press releases which stated that the object of the congress was to bring scientific thought to bear on the problems of maintaining peace and reducing East-West tension.

The lead time provided was relatively short; nevertheless, the congress quickly received acceptances from a large number of eminent persons, including Albert Szent-Györgyi, Nobel laureate in medicine; M. Stanley Livingston, director of the Cambridge Electron Accelerator, at Harvard; Gardner Murphy, director of research at the Menninger Foundation; Louis B. Sohn, professor of international law at Harvard and an influential government adviser on disarmament problems; Freeman J. Dyson, chairman of the American Federation of Scientists; Tom Stonier, of the Rockefeller Institute; Harold Taylor, former president of Sarah Lawrence College; Harlow Shapley, director emeritus of the Harvard Observatory; Sir Robert Watson-Watt, the radar pioneer; Stringfellow Barr, former president of St. Johns College; and Brigadier General T. R. Phillips, military affairs writer for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

Open to Public

These were among the most widely recognized names, but in addition there were hundreds of individuals whose professional training qualified them to participate in the proceedings that were announced by the organizers of the congress. In addition, there were several hundred persons who were present solely because of their concern over the perilous relationship that exists between East and West—not because their background equipped them to help establish "a science and a program for human survival." They, too, became part of the congress, simply by registering and paying \$5 in advance or \$7.50 at the meeting. They were formally present as observers, whereas the specialists were on hand as consultants, but as the congress proceeded, the distinction between consultant and observer became some-

what blurred. After the consultants had discussed their subjects at some 40 separate panels, the observers, who were present throughout the discussions, joined in. While all participants were bound together by mutual concern for humanity's fate, it must be said that the level of discussion was at times incredibly uneven. It ranged from sophisticated discussions of the inspection problems presented by biological and chemical weapons to ardent, but hardly relevant, pleas for world leaders to behave more reasonably.

As the congress proceeded it was becoming plain that many of the specialists who had responded to a call to establish a "science of survival" were becoming pretty well fed up with what one described as "nothing more than a public bull session on big problems." When the heads of the various discussion groups reported before the whole congress Sunday morning, the dissatisfaction was explicitly stated, and it ultimately contributed to the bedlam of the closing session later that afternoon.

A Scientific Meeting?

Reporting to the congress on the panels that considered "The Socioeconomic Consequences of the Nuclear Arms Race," Donald N. Michael, director of the Peace Research Institute, protested the general nature of the proceedings. "For an organization that has 'scientist' in its title," he said, "I would expect more attention to facts and to where facts are missing." Michael noted that 'most of the topics have been discussed at length' in numerous publications and meetings, but the performance of many participants, he protested, indicated quite clearly that they were unfamiliar with fundamental aspects of the problems that the congress aimed to solve. "This meeting," he said, "shows a need to become as sophisticated as possible about this problem. If we're not sophisticated, it's just a nice way to express our feelings."

Following the reports, the congress rapidly proceeded into chaos. The immediate issue was a proposal to send President Kennedy a telegram protesting the proposed high-altitude nuclear tests; underlying the strife was the division between those who came to found a "science of survival" and those who viewed the congress as a device for political action. (The proposed telegram warned, "To move ahead [with the tests] is to stake the future of mankind in an ill-considered game of chance"

and added, "The plain fact is that this is a military rather than a scientific experiment and its execution violates the responsibility which every government must fulfill to its own people, and the rights of the people of the whole world.")

The telegram was instantly protested as an embarrassment to federally employed participants in the congress, who said they had been assured no statements would be issued in the name of the congress; and it was further assailed by a number of members as a violation of the intent of the congress. Among these were Tom Stonier, who said he was "appalled by what is going on. This is political action of the most naive sort." Stonier declared that "there is no shortcut to peace. It's not just coming up with some cheap gimmick. It's a long haul, you stand behind it, you push but quietly, you don't send telegrams from the hip." Amidst protests and considerable disorder it was agreed that the telegram would be sent, not from the congress, but from its executive council with the "general assent" of the conference. Individuals were invited to sign; about 125 signatures were collected, including Stonier's, who took the position that he supported the *content* of the telegram, but was opposed to the *congress* taking positions on such issues. In the heat of debate, no consideration was given to the likelihood that the people who would receive the telegram in the White House might not undertake the sort of exegesis necessary to illuminate the distinction between a "general assent" of the congress and a decision of the congress.

Meanwhile, the congress's progress into chaos continued to accelerate, accompanied, and perhaps stimulated, by the curious practice of permitting all on hand the right to offer resolutions and vote on the proceedings. The effect of the one-man-one-vote procedure was to equate the professionals with those who brought to the congress nothing more than a desire for something to be done about the sorry state of world affairs. This reflected the democratic spirit, but for those who thought they had come to a scientific meeting, it was infuriating.

Resolutions Protested

With Harlow Shapley presiding, the final session was thrown open to consideration of four resolutions produced by the resolutions committee. Briefly, these called for Scientists on Survival

to support (i) the establishment of an international scientific commission to promote the development of disarmament techniques; (ii) an international agreement on the peaceful uses of outer space; (iii) an international agreement to prevent experiments which may "endanger the safety of mankind;" and (iv) the establishment, "under government auspices of a council for the creation of a peace economy."

A battery of stenographers would have had to be present to provide a reasonably complete account of what followed the presentation of these resolutions, but it is generally agreed that whatever happened, it happened amid constant disorder.

The four resolutions were considered adopted on the basis of shouted approval, but their status was left unclear when a motion was adopted calling for all resolutions to be tabled for study. These presumably included a resolution by James, the hostage plan promoter, asking the congress to urge scientists to study his plan, as well as resolutions calling for support of the "peace movement" and attendance at the Moscow Peace Conference.

The scheduled purpose of the final session was a "business meeting and nomination of officers and committees," but because of the confusion and dissension it was agreed that a provisional council would be appointed to consider the future of the congress and report in 6 months. Leake was elected chairman. The other members are Shapley, Hudson Hoagland, Frank Fremont-Smith, Gerald Wendt, Stuart Cook, Szent-Györgyi, Carl Binger, Watson-Watt, Robert Holt, Gardner Murphy, and Bryant M. Wedge.

Their task is principally a salvage operation, for many scientists who came to the congress with high hopes and enthusiasm went away plainly disgusted. (One of the American Association for Social Psychiatry members who helped found the congress showed an infallible instinct for silver linings by commenting "the conference was a healthy thing because it brought out so much disagreement.")

The large and rapid response to the congress's invitations shows that a good many scientists are eager to offer their skills to promote peace and disarmament, but those who wish to enlist their efforts and enthusiasm might well keep in mind that a town meeting is not a scientific meeting.

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