

Letters

Vietnam

It is truly a shame when two scientists whose work I have respected highly for many years step outside their fields of competence to advise other scientists not to help their country in time of a national emergency (Luria and Szent-Györgyi, Letters, 6 Oct.). Whether or not we agree that the war should be fought, or how it is fought, the incontrovertible fact remains that our country is fighting a war. . . . To say that they "believe that the Vietnam war is both a national catastrophe and a moral blight for our country" skirts the issue that Americans are being killed in Vietnam. Not helping our country will not shorten the war. It will merely increase the number of American casualties. . . . Many of the people who are protesting most loudly worked very hard to help elect this administration. These people should search their own consciences before advising others not to help their government in augmenting the policies that they voted for them to make. Pollard (Letters, 18 Aug. and 27 Oct.) should be congratulated for his efforts to help organize scientists to use their abilities to help their country in this time of need, even though he does not approve of the war.

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Luria and Szent-Györgyi stated that "Several thousand university professors, including a large percentage of scientists, have expressed their opposition to the Vietnam war in public statements, newspaper ads, and open letters to the President." On such a highly controversial issue, dissenters are more likely to express their views than supporters. As a scientist, I wonder whether even larger numbers of scientists are in general accord with the Vietnam

policies of the Administration. I should like to cite an analogy. At the 1967 annual meeting of the American Society for Microbiology (of which Luria is now president), a resolution was introduced to dissolve the standing committee advisory to the U.S. Army Biological Laboratories. After considerable discussion, the resolution was rejected on a standing vote by a majority I estimated to be at least 8 to 1.

Luria and Szent-Györgyi further state that "It may . . . be wise for many of us who oppose the war to review our present professional activities in order to make sure that they do not unnecessarily contribute to the waging and prolongation of that war." I would call upon the many scientists who support the war effort to make sure their professional activities do just that. Communists are, and always have been, openly dedicated to the destruction of systems of democracy such as that practiced in the United States. Fighting communism in Vietnam is a dirty, complicated, exasperating task. But unless we win, we shall surely have to fight again closer to home.

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I congratulate Luria and Szent-Györgyi on their forthright statement. As to Lukes who urges "intellectuals" to become reconciled with Johnson lest they be excluded from the councils of power—*sancta simplicitas*!

There is an old saying: "He that sups with the devil must have a long spoon." When the devil is an institutional monster that threatens to destroy our honor even before it claims our lives, there is no spoon long enough to tempt a free man to such a feast.

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In his review of two books on aging (4 Aug., p. 534), Bernard Strehler quite correctly points out the dimensions of the problem confronting scientists involved in studies of biological aging. He departs from the books, however, to castigate NIH, arguing that it has been an "obstacle to progress" and has shown a "discouraging lack of interest in the initiation of a vigorous effort to understand the fundamental phenomenon." He shows consternation over the assignment of gerontology to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, "where it is subsidiary to obstetrics, gynecology, and pediatrics." Furthermore, he complains of "unsympathetic study-section committees with competitive interests." To correct these deficiencies, he outlines a four-point program including the creation of a National Institute for Aging Research and the establishment of a study section on aging.

As a member of the Program-Project Committee of NICHD from 1964 to 1967, I served on most of the site visits to research centers concerned with the study of aging. The committee was composed of a wide variety of biological specialists, all of whom were eager to support scientifically meritorious research. Many, many hours of study, review, and consultation were devoted to requests for support in research on aging. Excellence in research deserves support, but I am sure Strehler will agree that where the commitment to excellence is obscure, the personnel untrained, and the institutional environment unpromising, support should be withheld. Having worked closely with NIH staff, I flatly reject as erroneous Strehler's statement that NIH has been an obstacle to progress in this field. I wish also to say emphatically that aging research is not a subsidiary to other specialties within the NICHD. Strehler's complaint regarding unsympathetic study-section committees is without foundation. . . .

A separate institute for research on aging is an expensive way to call attention to a broad-based, highly complex, and conceptually vague area of investigation. The NICHD has a definite mandate that includes support of research on aging. It is aware of the need to have trained scientists move into that field. The members of the Program-Project Committee wholeheartedly support Strehler's plea for more and better basic research on aging.