

houseboy came to me and said a black man was at the door. I told him to take his name and that we would see him some other time, since I was busy getting ready for the evening. He came back with the man's name, and I realized at once that it was our guest. Natu-

rally, I was surprised that he was black, but we had a marvelous evening. After it was over, the houseboy said to me, 'Why can that man eat with you and the master [a common form of address that South African domestic and hotel employees use to whites] and I can't?' I

told him, 'When your brain is as good as that man's, you can eat with me and the master.'"

"So, you see," she concluded in telling this story, "things here are not the way you probably thought they were."—D. S. GREENBERG

Dissent and Reaction: Vigilante Activity at NBS Labs in Boulder

The polarization that afflicts American society has struck even the placid Boulder (Colorado) Laboratories of the National Bureau of Standards. Over the past 6 months Warren Bingham, a 30-year-old peace activist employed as an engineering technician at the laboratories, has been subjected to what he regards as a "pattern of discrimination" and of "day-to-day repression" in retaliation for his political activities on behalf of various peace groups. Bingham charges that laboratory officials have pressured him to stop participating in local peace demonstrations, have threatened to fire him, and have condoned, if not encouraged, a "vigilante group" of blue-collar workers that has harassed him in a series of bizarre incidents ranging from threats on his life to the filling of his car with some 5 bushels of sheep dung.

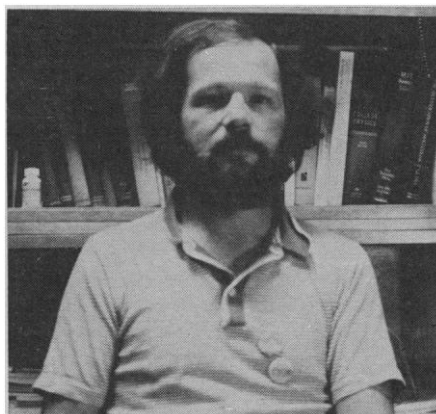
"Things got so bad at one point that I didn't even dare to leave my office," Bingham told *Science*. "You hear people say that the United States government is good at producing radicals. Well, that's certainly the case. This year has radicalized me more than the preceding 15 years put together."

Bingham is a Quaker, a pacifist, a conscientious objector, and a believer in what he calls "anarchistic socialism." "My concerns are moralistic," he says. "I'm not a Weatherman out bombing things on the weekends. I believe in non-violence." Bingham took undergraduate courses at M.I.T. but dropped out of school to support himself. He has since taken courses at Harvard and held a variety of jobs. Last September he joined the NBS Boulder operation after compiling an impressive work record as a technician at the Harvard College Observatory. He is now in the midst of a probationary

period served by new government employees.

A well-rounded evaluation of Bingham's plight is somewhat difficult to obtain. Bascom W. Birmingham, head of the Boulder laboratories, tried to persuade *Science* there was no merit in Bingham's complaints but then refused to allow his views to be published. "If you print this, I'll deny being quoted," he said. The official NBS position—as expressed in an interview at the Bureau's Gaithersburg, Maryland, headquarters by Allen Farrar, legal adviser, and Robert Walleigh, associate director for administration—is that there has been no "official" harassment of Bingham and that the laboratory, in fact, has taken steps to curb the vigilantes. Farrar said that Bingham is being fired in early September but he said this is not because of Bingham's political activities but rather because he has compiled an "unsatisfactory" work record. Bingham believes otherwise, however, and he contends that the firing is just the last chapter in a "pattern of ideological discrimination" against him.

Bingham's troubles seem to have



Warren Bingham

started back in January when he participated in week-long demonstrations sponsored by the Boulder Workshop in Non-Violence, a largely Quaker group that Bingham had helped to found. The group picketed and passed out leaflets at a high school, a public utility, a court house, a draft board office, a church, and the Rocky Flats plutonium plant of Dow Chemical Co. The leaflets charged that "many of the institutions of our society work together to destroy life." The school was accused of turning out "docile citizens," the utility of polluting the environment, the draft board of enforcing "slavery," and the church of compromising on war.

Bingham says that when he returned from picketing at the high school during his lunch hour he was told by an administrative official that he was not to engage in such demonstrations any more because Birmingham, the laboratory head, was "very upset." (Birmingham's office had received a complaint from the high school principal.) Bingham also says that on at least three separate occasions during the week he was told by various senior personnel at the laboratory that he had better drop out of the demonstrations or else he might be fired. "They said Birmingham was a conservative man and he was not going to put up with this affront," Bingham says. "They said I'd better conform or there'd be trouble." But Bingham refused to heed the advice, which he says was usually tendered in a "fatherly" way. There was sharp disagreement over whether Bingham was playing politics on government time (by taking extraordinarily long lunch hours) or on his own time, but this was resolved when Bingham agreed, under protest, to take an hour's annual leave for every noon hour he picketed.

A short while after the week of demonstrations ended, Bingham says, he was further harassed by being called to a meeting with a personnel official at which he was told there was "some question about my security clearance." Bingham says he was told that "an FBI report" had turned up evidence

detrimental to him. Actually, there is some confusion about just what the report, which is supposed to be kept confidential, involved. Farrar, the NBS legal adviser, says that Bingham's job does not require a security clearance and that the report he refers to was a "national agency check" that is routinely used to help determine the "suitability" of candidates for government employment. But Bingham claims his superiors in Boulder have consistently said he was undergoing a "security investigation" and, indeed, one of his superiors used those words in an interview with *Science*.

What did the investigation turn up? Bingham says the evidence he was confronted with included an arrest when he was "14 or 15 years old"; the fact that he was divorced from his first wife for "cruel and abusive treatment" (Bingham says that was the standard ground for divorce in his home state of Massachusetts and notes that he couldn't have been too abusive, since the court granted him custody of his children); an allegation that his first child had arrived less than 9 months after he got married; and such miscellaneous complaints as that he gave loud parties. "It was such a sick thing that it was ineffective," he says.

Officials of NBS say the investigation was coincidental with Bingham's other troubles and had no bearing on the decision to fire him. But Bingham says his superiors repeatedly warned him to "be very careful" because "these people have this over your head and are willing to use it." As an example, he said that when he was interviewed on a television news show with actress Jane Fonda about the desirability of "tax resistance" in opposition to the war in Indochina, "two days later the security thing came up again."

Bingham contends that ever since last January he has been subjected to continued harassment. He claims that during the week of protests in January he repeatedly had his picture taken by strange men. "One night two men burst into a room at the United Protestant Center in Boulder and took two pictures of me and my wife," Bingham recalls. "It was really incredible—as though I was a Communist agent." Bingham also says that laboratory officials on several occasions have suggested he change his appearance ("I've got a neatly trimmed beard, and while my hair is longer than average, it's combed and washed," he says. "I'm not

a street freak.") Bingham also says he was threatened with firing as a result of things he had said to a women's group in Broomfield, Colorado, and to a session of an environmental teach-in at the University of Colorado. Some of the women apparently complained to NBS that Bingham had advocated the overthrow of the government, and they apparently threatened to carry their complaint to Senator Peter Dominick (R-Colo.), but Bingham says the most radical thing he said was that you can't rely on the government or on a capitalist economy to solve various critical problems.

The harassment of Bingham seems to have reached a peak when he wore a black armband to work to protest the Cambodian invasion. According to Bingham, a group of blue-collar workers, organized by an ex-Marine, assigned men to follow him around all day, continually burst into his office, yelled obscenities, and made threats against his life. Bingham says the vigilantes also on various occasions over a 2-week period in May filled his office with chairs and waste baskets, spilled the contents of drawers on the floor, put a huge dog turd in the front of his car, and then topped that by filling his car with about 5 bushels of sheep manure. Someone also stole an extensive file of material he was collecting for a possible lawsuit against NBS.

In the midst of the turmoil, Bingham was given an oral directive—emanating from the office of Birmingham, the laboratory chief—to remove his armband. The upshot of a few days of negotiations was that Bingham refused to knuckle under and kept his armband on, Birmingham asked his headquarters in Washington for an opinion, and the NBS legal adviser ruled that Bingham was within his rights to keep the armband on as long as he didn't expound his political views at work. Birmingham was also told to tolerate no further disturbances from the vigilantes, and NBS officials insist there have been no disturbances or threats since.

However, Bingham remains convinced that Birmingham and his assistants at least implicitly encouraged the vigilante actions. Robert Conger, a glassblower at the laboratory who recently entered medical school, also believes the vigilante action was "kind of promoted by upper echelon people." Conger says he heard the vigilante leader say that Birmingham's office had told him that if enough people complained about Bingham "maybe some-

thing could be done." In effect, says Conger, the laboratory management was telling the vigilante to go out and round up more complaints. However, a top laboratory official told *Science* the vigilante was simply told that "a single complaint didn't make a whole mountain." The official said the vigilante was not told that he could get Bingham fired simply by gathering complaints.

The harassment of Bingham seems to have outraged at least a few senior scientists at the laboratory. Harold S. Boyne, chief of the radio standards physics division, in which Bingham works, complained in a memorandum to the laboratory management that it was not "equitable" to order Bingham to remove his armband. In an internal memorandum that has inadvertently come to light, Boyne said that Bingham had merely been exercising "his right to dissent with U.S. policies" and that he had not organized any protest movement within NBS and had not harassed anyone. In contrast, Boyne wrote, the vigilantes had organized "a repressive campaign directed at Mr. Bingham's right to peaceful dissent, his character and his integrity as a U.S. citizen." Boyne added that "the constant parade of people bent on a campaign of harassment is a matter of great concern . . . and has seriously undermined division morale."

The issue of Bingham's being fired is unfortunately clouded by the fact that he does indeed seem to have performed poorly on the job. Although Bingham's previous supervisor at the Harvard College Observatory considered him to be an "outstanding technician," his supervisors at NBS have judged his performance "unsatisfactory." Some of Bingham's friends told *Science* he had not performed well in Boulder, and Bingham himself acknowledges that he has not produced much in the past several months, but he blames this on the harassment and on what he regards as an effort to deprive him of meaningful work. The case involves such a melange of interrelating factors—job performance, the "security" check, and political antagonisms—that it is probably impossible for many of the principals to say just why they decided that Bingham must go. Would Bingham have been fired for poor job performance if he had not also participated in political protests? Asked that question, Robert Walleigh, NBS associate director, acknowledged that no one can ever be certain.—PHILIP M. BOFFEY