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The Chicago Meeting

The AAAS has had an important role in efforts to use science and technology for the long-term benefit of mankind. The annual meeting has been especially effective in dealing with many interactions of science and society. National political and administrative actions in such fields as environmental regulation can be traced to ideas presented there. The diversity of speakers and ideas has been a major basis for the effectiveness of the meeting. Instead of attempting to lay down a "party line," AAAS has provided a platform for scientists of all disciplines and political persuasions, including ultraliberals. Although there have been vigorous clashes of personalities and ideas, the proceedings have been conducted in a fair and orderly way.

During the past 2 years and especially at the Chicago meeting, there has been a departure from tolerance which, if permitted to continue, would destroy the value of the convention. Key speakers would refuse to participate; large audiences would not come to listen to a one-sided "discussion"; and the press would go elsewhere.

The disorders at Chicago were instigated by a group of militants that numbered about 50 out of a total of 6000 or more attendees. The group began its preparations many months ago. A handbill distributed in November by an organizing group invited to a planning session "all people interested in planning counter-tours, counter-seminars, or just general agitation." Throughout these premeeting activities, AAAS was referred to as AAA\$. Presumably this indicated a belief that AAAS is a wealthy organization, for the militants attempted to discourage payment of registration fees. Actually AAAS had a deficit of more than \$100,000 in 1970, and meeting revenues have never come close to covering costs.

During the convention, militants focused on disrupting a few sessions, tormenting selected speakers, and obtaining maximum coverage in the media. Their efforts to bring notoriety to themselves and to tarnish the image of AAAS were to some extent successful. Many scientists and the public at large got the impression that the meeting consisted mainly in a series of riots. In fact, more than 95 percent of the individual sessions were conducted without incident. One of the most notable failures of the militants was their inability to gain support among the hundreds of students in attendance. Indeed many of the students were "turned off," for they had come, sometimes from a distance, to hear certain speakers and were denied that right; to them, confrontation is old stuff.

From the standpoint of the press, the militants did not advance their cause; nor did they advance the cause of science. Comment in the 1 January issue of the *Washington Post* was typical of that across the land: "Shouting appeared to be the chief intellectual resource of the younger scientists who refer to themselves as 'radicals' more or less in the manner of Nazi stormtroopers who used to call themselves 'socialists.' But their radicalism seems to consist of no more than a rejection of reason and an unwillingness to let anyone but themselves be heard. . . . It should not be beyond the power of scientists to restore reason to its normal throne at their conventions. . . . It is a scientific fact, we believe, that only a single speaker can be heard at a particular time in a particular place. Those who want to hear him should be free to do so; those who do not should be free to go away. This is not alone the basis of science; it is also the essence of freedom."—PHILIP H. ABELSON