

Inside AAAS

The Centennial Annual Meeting, Starring Harry Truman and Civil Liberties

The [AAAS] centennial meeting opened on the evening of 13 September [1948] with a plenary session in Constitution Hall [in Washington, D.C.]. A brief address by President Harry S Truman was followed by the retiring presidential address of Harlow Shapley. With the convention theme being "One World of Science," Shapley entitled his address "The One World of Stars," a talk full of examples and advantages of international cooperation in astronomical studies.

That evening, however, most of the attention was focused on President Truman. It would have been difficult for the President to give an address more to the liking of the audience. He called for greater financial support of research, repeated his endorsement of the proposed National Science Foundation, and urged the Congress to pass the enabling legislation. He de-

scribed the conditions of freedom and open communication needed for progress in science and belabored those in government who thought the nation's security could be better guarded by excessive secrecy concerning what was already known than by creating conditions leading to new advances in knowledge. Two days later, the AAAS board of directors adopted a resolution thanking the President and endorsing his statement. Well they might; it would not have been more favorable to scientific progress if the directors themselves had written the speech.

As a matter of fact, the first draft was written by a future president of AAAS. Truman had not accepted the invitation to speak until just before the meeting. On Friday night, 3 days before the meeting was to open, he was sailing down the Potomac River on the presi-

dential yacht with Clark Clifford, his special counsel, and John Steelman, who headed the President's science policy staff. They discussed the AAAS invitation and agreed that the President should accept it. Saturday morning Clifford telephoned George M. Elsey, one of the President's assistants, and asked him to prepare a suitable address of about 10 minutes length. That request was an unexpected interruption, for Elsey was busy preparing outlines for the many short talks President Truman was planning to give on his "whistle-stop" campaign trip to the West Coast, a trip that was to start only a few days later. Putting that task aside, Elsey set to work preparing the President's address, starting with a draft that had earlier been submitted by Edward U. Condon, director of the Bureau of Standards and soon-to-be president of AAAS. Between Saturday morning and Monday evening the address went through five drafts and was reviewed or edited by David Bell, Clark Clifford, Charles Ross, and a few others, including Truman himself, for the fifth draft shows changes in his handwriting, as does the final reading copy.

Condon must have been pleased as he heard the address proceed and recognized the ideas being expressed. The audience, too, was pleased, not only by the content but also by the President's manner. Early in the address, as one attentive listener recalls, Truman misread a sentence, giving it exactly the opposite meaning from what was obviously intended. "He stopped abruptly, in a sense grinning at himself, and laughed, as the audience did

This is an excerpt from Dael Wolfe's *Renewing a Scientific Society: The American Association for the Advancement of Science from World War II to 1970*, which AAAS is publishing this month. Wolfe was AAAS executive officer from 1954 to 1970. The book, publication number 89-14S, is \$24.95 (\$19.95 for AAAS members). Prepaid or Visa/Mastercard orders should go to AAAS Books, Dept. INS, P.O. Box 753, Waldorf, MD 20604.

... [then] said 'That reminds me of a story!' " He had the audience with him.

Newspaper reports the next day emphasized the President's attacks on some of the witch-hunts then being conducted by the House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities (the Thomas Committee). The *Washington Post* headlined a first page account "Truman Hits Smears on Scientists" and quoted the President's statement that the indispensable work of American scientists "may be made impossible by the creation of an atmosphere in which no man feels safe against the public airing of unfounded rumors, gossip, and vilification." That attitude toward the House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities had been more succinctly expressed 2 days earlier in the *Sunday Post* by the cartoonist Herblock. His cartoon showed Chairman Thomas asking the other members of the committee "How did atomic energy information leak out to the damned scientists in the first place?"

The *New York Times* head-



President Harry Truman addressing the AAAS Centennial Meeting.

lined its account "Truman Charges Smears and Gossip Hinder Scientists: Hits Politicians: President Says 'Red Herings' Curb, Not Help Security." Neither Edward Condon nor any other targets of the smear campaigns were mentioned by name in the President's address, but many members of the audience were familiar with the House Committee's—and especially Congressman Richard Vail's—characterization of Condon as "the weakest link in our atomic security chain." William Laurence, science editor of the *Times*, concluded the story by writing that as Truman finished speaking he went down the front row of officers and members of the association who were seated on the platform and "smiled broadly as he shook Condon's hand." He probably did not know that Condon had written the first draft of the address he had just given, but he surely knew that Condon was one of the smeared victims he had been talking about.

Although no one knew it at the time, that address ended a long tradition. At every previous Washington meeting of AAAS—in 1854, 1891, 1902, 1911, and 1924—the President either spoke or recognized the association in some other way, such as a reception at the White House. In 1958 President Eisenhower was reminded of that long tradition and was invited to address the association, but the invitation was not persuasive; golf in Georgia was more attractive than staying in Washington for Christmas week. President Eisenhower did, however, come to New York the following September to ad-

dress the banquet session of the association's Symposium on Basic Research.

AAAS meetings have regularly received substantial attention from the media, and the centennial meeting was no exception. Some 180 reporters wrote accounts for their newspapers or magazines. All three radio networks and the new field of television reported on the meeting. CBS gave it the largest amount of time, reporting several daily features and ending each day with a late evening commentary devoted exclusively to the meeting. On one evening CBS staged its popular *Town Meeting of the Air* in Constitution Hall, broadcasting a discussion on "What Hope for Man" by Brock Chisholm, director general of the World Health Organization; Fairfield Osborn, president of

the New York Zoological Society; Harlow Shapley, chairman of the AAAS board of directors and professor of astronomy at Harvard; and Edmund W. Sinnott, AAAS president and director of the Sheffield Scientific School at Yale. Irving Gitlin of CBS concluded that the hours that CBS had devoted to reporting the meeting "represent coverage of an organizational meeting second only to that devoted to political conventions." ■ DAEL WOLFLE

Arms Control Colloquium Set

Representative Les Aspin (D-WI), who chairs the House Armed Services Committee, will speak on defense priorities in an era of arms control and budget constraints at the Fourth Annual AAAS Collo-

quium on Science, Arms Control, and National Security. "Technology Advances and the Arms Control Agenda" will be held 16 and 17 November at the Capital Hilton, Washington, D.C.

Recent arms control progress and a reduction in East-West tensions will form the meeting backdrop. Topics will range from the relationship between civilian and military R&D to new technologies for verifying arms control agreements to chemical weapons. The meeting will conclude with Richard Garwin, IBM Research Center, talking on science and national security.

Information is available from the AAAS Program on Science, Arms Control, and National Security, 1333 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20005, 202-326-6490.

AAAS Council

The AAAS Council will hold its next meeting on 19 February 1990 during the Annual Meeting in New Orleans. Organizations or individuals who want to present proposals or resolutions for possible inclusion in the meeting agenda should send them (in writing) to Executive Officer Richard S. Nicholson by 7 November 1989.

The items should be consistent with AAAS objectives and deal with matters appropriate for consideration by the council of a scientific organization. Each should be given a brief title. Resolutions should be in the traditional format, beginning with "whereas" statements of fact and concluding "therefore be it resolved," followed by a position that flows logically from the stated premises. Items dealing with technical matters must be accompanied by supporting data and references.

Proposals involving substantial expenditure of AAAS funds should be presented in the form of a research proposal and accompanied by a budget.

Items adopted by the Council will be published in *Science*. If you seek wider distribution of

an item, you should submit names and addresses of the target individuals, organizations, or publications along with your proposal.

The Committee on Council Affairs will hold an open hearing on the submitted items at 2:30 p.m. on 16 February at the New Orleans Hilton. Late proposals or resolutions delivered to the executive officer in advance will be considered immediately following the hearing, provided they deal with urgent matters and are accompanied by a written explanation of why they were not submitted by the fall deadline.

The committee also will review and take action on requests from those who wish to address the council meeting on agenda items. Such requests must be delivered to the executive officer or committee chairman Donald N. Langenberg before the 16 February meeting.

Summaries of the council meeting agenda will be available during the Annual Meeting at the AAAS Information Desk at the Hilton. The full agenda can also be inspected.

■ MARGE WHITE, Executive Office