Letters

Science Planks and Party Platforms

The time is once again approaching when the political parties choose their candidates and construct their platforms. Adlai Stevenson called it "the liberal hour"—a time when new ideas may find oasis in previously sterile political sand. The revolutionary changes of the past two decades and those in prospect make it mandatory that the political parties open up avenues of communication to the scientific community. Good stout planks need to be hammered into the platforms of both parties.

A group of illustrious scientists took the initiative in the field of scientist-to-politician communication in 1959–60 when the Democratic Advisory Council was served by a Committee on Science and Technology. During these years a score of scientists mingled with top-ranking Democrats and prepared a series of policy recommendations on science and technology. It was in this interaction of science and politics that the concept of a National Peace Agency was formed. As senator, John F. Kennedy introduced this concept as a legislative proposal, and as president, he saw it converted into the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Administration. Clearly, this single example illustrates the value of informed discourse in the area of science and politics.

The Democratic Advisory Council is not now in existence, having fulfilled its objective with the election of a liberal Democratic president in 1960. It ceased operations after President Kennedy's election.

The Republicans have created a Gettysburg Council which corresponds to the original Democratic Advisory Council in function, if not in structure, but to date there has been no announcement of a significant scientific component. (I have not heard of any Scientists-for-Goldwater or-for-any-other-Republican group being organized.) It is safe to say that the party out of power could profit from the advice of qualified scientists, and it can be argued that the party in power could also use advice free from the bias of officeholders. Issues having a basic technological content are likely to enter into the political arena this year. The fact that the Republicans composed a critical report on space activities last spring indicates that the moon race might become a political dogfight this summer and fall.

Research and development is now a $16 billion-per-annum budget item for the United States, and the future funding of science and technology should be a matter of concern to every scientist and to every citizen. Apart from national security considerations, the nation depends upon modern science and technology for the efficient use of natural resources, the production of energy, and improvements in transportation and communication. The health and well-being of our citizens is keyed to the scientific revolution. But the cornucopia of modern science also spills forth upon society an abundance that requires control. The problems of pollution, contamination, untoward effects, and excess productivity are largely unsolved in political terms.

Given the power of science and its impact upon society, it seems appropriate to suggest that some organization poll the scientific "community," determine its views on current issues, such as Project Apollo, high-energy physics funding, and R&D emphasis in the various fields, and report on these to the platform committees of both parties. The AAAS is in a strategic position to circularize its membership and conduct a referendum on scientific and technical matters of interest to the Congress and to the public.

Presumably few scientists will rub elbows with the politicians when the Republicans convene at San Francisco in July and the Democrats gather at Atlantic City a month later; all the more reason for the scientific community to make its inputs to the conventions by way of a nonpartisan statement of the issues which science and technology present to our democracy.

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Jargon of Genetics

I find myself in possession of exceptionally useful jargon but lack concepts to hangthemon. Perhaps someone can help with conceptions like cistron, recon, muton, operon, replicon, polaron, codon, hypotheson, complon, and the like. I particularly would like to find uses for: genon, polyon, chiasmatron, copyon, crossingoveron, and on. I can suggest:

Offnon: a factron in phase variation.

Factron: a unit of mutation, recombination, and function, to replace an obsolete word which does not end in -on. Perhaps unitron or even trion would be better.

Morgon: an old-time geneticist, I think.

Pion: factron at the end of a circular chromoson (unpublished).

Chromoson: home of all the -ons, including on itself.

Oneron: simultaneous publication or function of two morons.

Moron: the smallest unit of new information.

And, for a unit of frustration (*1*):

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Note

1. *Publication No. 1 of the Cistrionics Institute,* which recommends conservative replication of cistron and operon, and dispersive replication of the reston. A portion of this work was not supported.

Chemical Inhibition of Viruses

Tamm and Eggers have recently summarized work on various chemical substances which specifically inhibit the replication of certain animal viruses [*Science* **142**, 24 (1963)]. Work from my laboratory [*Science* **141**, 1065 (1963)] has dealt with a specific inhibitory effect of streptomycin on certain bacterial viruses. Tamm and Eggers suggested that their antiviral agents acted on the nucleic acid of the virus, and we intimated the same possibility. I would now like to suggest an alternative hypothesis that seems to me more agreeable to the biological and chemical facts, namely that these antiviral agents work by combining with a virus-specific protein.

An important aspect of both reports was that among a group of related viruses attacking a single host, certain viruses were sensitive whereas others were completely resistant to the drugs