

NEW TOOLS FOR AN ABUNDANT LIFE

A PROGRESSIVE PROGRAM TO SECURE FOR THE PEOPLE THE BENEFITS OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Notice

This is a preliminary draft. It is proposed that this statement be rechecked by scientists, then rewritten by writers, and be illustrated by artists.

Science is a growing body of knowledge and also a powerful method of solving problems; it continually transforms the conditions of life and makes possible either a world designed for satisfying human needs or by contrast, a world equipped with the means of efficiently destroying all life. We choose the creative applications of science and reject its use for war or for the profit of the few at the expense of the many. More and more scientists are finding common cause with their fellow citizens in seeking a practical democratic means of realizing this essential goal. We wish to speak out with those who feel the great possibilities of science in the service of man and who realize that enlightened political action, independent of the old political parties, is a necessity. Fortunately in our United States of America it is possible to influence the trend of events by voting, by criticism or praise of government or corporate policy, by public discussion of issues, and in many other political ways, including the formation of new political parties.

There are a number of questions which need examination in this regard:

- (1) What is the role of science in our country at the present time?

It is generally acknowledged that science is not now being used for promoting the general welfare to anywhere near the extent possible. There are two major reasons: First, the drive toward war has diverted a considerable number of scientists from their normal peacetime activities. Basic scientific developments are invariably retarded by war or preparation for war since during such

periods most scientists are not gaining fundamental new knowledge as is their usual custom, but merely applying old knowledge for purposes that have little use in peacetime. For example, the emphasis on atomic bombs has resulted in shamefully few applications of atomic fission, even to purely scientific problems. Second, the motive for doing scientific research and for improving methods of production is primarily not one of public service but one of securing a private gain, whether or not it benefits the public. True, we can see a great many important benefits of science which are available to the common man, and these must not be discounted. However, these benefits come to us partly as a result of public support for research centers, such as medical institutes or government and university laboratories, partly as a result of public vigilance in exposing the profit-seeking arrangements of the corporations - and partly as a by-product of private industry. Some industries genuinely seek, through a program of scientific research, to improve the quality and decrease the cost of useful products. It must be remembered, however, that research is costly and its fruits usually take years to mature. Hence these progressive industries are exceptions and often yield to temptations of immediate profits, especially when they have acquired a monopoly position. Also, these same industries bring about their improvements at the cost of displacing labor or making labor more routine and less suited to human requirements. Science has been applied much more generally to improving a factory product than to the betterment of the worker in the factory. In addition, much research is done merely to keep possible competitors out of the field.

The common understanding that many inventions are secretly suppressed by private interests, cannot of course, be as fully documented as can the few examples of the opposite behavior. However, the electric battery industry furnishes an example of how this practice probably works out in many other cases. In this instance the record has been made clear by the proceedings of the Justice Dept. in a little publicized anti-trust suit against the major battery companies for their agreeing to withhold from the market a new nickel-cadmium battery which