

GENERAL SCIENCE

Private Lives Invaded

Leading scientists on AEC committee protest FBI clearance for Atomic Energy Commission fellowship holders as "federal interference with private lives of citizens."

► **STRONG** disapproval of the requirement that all holders of AEC fellowships be cleared by an FBI investigation is expressed by the nine members of the Atomic Energy Commission's general advisory committee headed by Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer, director of the Institute for Advanced Study. Partial text of the statement follows:

Admittedly, the tensions of the times and the secret nature of the atomic energy work require elaborate checks for all who have access to classified material. But to carry over the same security concepts to holders of fellowships who will in no way have access to secret or confidential information seems to us both unwise and unnecessary.

It is clear that these requirements of FBI investigation of prospective holders of AEC fellowships would be to extend still further the area of federal interference with the private lives of citizens. We use the word "interference" advisedly, for it is evident that the type of questioning of friends, relatives, and acquaintances required by the investigative procedures of the FBI do constitute an encroachment on the private affairs of many people.

To repeat, we grant this to be necessary in these times in those cases where persons are to be employed on secret government matters. But we are horrified by the prospects of moving this whole semi-police apparatus into the realm of youth. We believe that the reputation of many young people of the country might be adversely impaired by rumors growing out of such a system of investigation of prospective fellowship holders.

Older people can see in proper perspective calls from FBI agents, they can answer questions about acquaintances without feeling that the man being investigated is under suspicion. But young people of university age are likely to react quite differently. An atmosphere of suspicion and uncertainty is likely to be generated by the activities of federal agents among many groups of friends in colleges, universities, and in local communities.

In short, the results of requiring investigations of candidates of fellowships will have serious repercussions throughout the country . . .

Against the evil effects which we believe will probably follow the adoption of the proposals for FBI clearance of AEC fellows, let us place the possible gains. Let us admit that without such clearance an occasional clandestine member of the Communist party might receive a fellowship. But even the proponents of the proposals do not contend that security will be thereby endangered, for the holder of the fellowship has no privileges in regard to classified information.

If after completing his studies the fellow wishes to work for the government he will be subjected quite properly to a thorough check which will reveal his affiliations if he is a Communist and he will be rejected. At the worst the government will have then spent its money on a man who can not be used for the furtherance of the national security.

But leaving aside the question of cost to the government, we submit the risk that a very few Communists may receive training though an open and uninvestigated

fellowship program represents a negligible loss, as compared to the bad effects on the spirit of our nation which would result from a further extension of counter-espionage methods to those of college age.

Besides Dr. Oppenheimer, the committee consists of: Dr. Oliver E. Buckley, President, Bell Telephone Laboratories; Dr. James B. Conant, President, Harvard University; Dr. Lee A. DuBridge, President, California Institute of Technology; Dr. Enrico Fermi, Professor of Physics, Institute for Nuclear Studies, University of Chicago; Dr. I. I. Rabi, Chairman, Department of Physics, Columbia University; Hartley Rowe, Vice President and Chief Engineer, United Fruit Company; Dr. Glenn T. Seaborg, Professor of Chemistry, University of California; Dr. Cyril S. Smith, Director, Institute for the Study of Metals, University of Chicago.

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