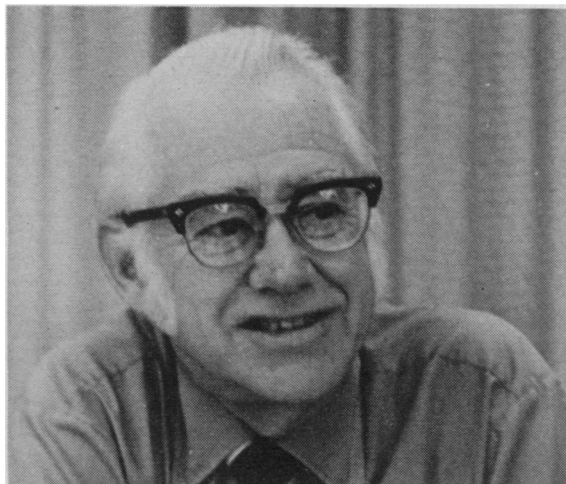


The professional movement

in the ACS

Professionalism has been afoot in the American Chemical Society since the 1930's when unemployment prompted the formation of a committee on professional and economic status. Futile attempts were made at the time to set a minimum salary for chemists. Since then other committees have met to discuss placing more emphasis on professional as opposed to purely educational and scientific matters. At one time, for instance, the society produced a statement on how employers should treat chemists. But these attempts usually received minimum staff support. The economic downturn of recent years, however, has once again stimulated interest in protecting and enhancing the status of chemists in their relations with their employers. Alan C. Nixon, president-elect of the ACS, has been active in the society and in the professionalism movement for many years. As a newly elected officer he plans to embark on a program of professionalism that, if fully implemented, could change the entire outlook of the ACS and could serve as a model for other scientific societies that have recently been moving in the same direction. But, as in the other societies, the American Physical Society in particular (SN: 4/29/72, p. 278), the program has stirred controversy and met some resistance.

At the recent ACS meeting in Boston Nixon discussed his aims in an interview with SCIENCE NEWS reporter Robert J. Trotter. The following are quotes from that interview.



C&E News

Alan Nixon: "It's simply a matter of giving the members confidence the society is working for their interests."

BACKGROUND: I worked at the Shell Development Co. in Emeryville, Calif., and was the first president of the Association of Industrial Scientists there. This was a professional movement that was started in the early 1940's. It was a union certified by the National Labor Relations Board. As a matter of fact, the ACS was responsible for the fact that the NLRB, in setting up the bargaining units there, set up a separate unit for the professional employees. Anyway, I was president there and have always been interested in the general area of employe-employer relationships and the economic status of chemists. I was chairman of the economic status committee for the California section for a number of years and have been active in committee work in the national.

I've also been writing a monthly column in our California section publication for about 10 years—commenting on the scene and trying to peer into the future about employment.

Then a couple of years ago the California section asked me if I would stand for president-elect—put my mouth where my pen had been. I agreed and was put in late as a petition candidate. I got about 35 percent of the vote, which was pretty encouraging so we decided to try again.

In the election last year we were able to politicize the society, although in a very mild way. We succeeded in getting a candidates' night for the three candidates at the Washington meeting. This was an innovative thing and most of the members felt it was a good idea. I also

visited about 50 local sections before the election—at their invitation. In this way I got a fairly good feeling for the grass-roots sentiment and, of course, got publicity with respect to the election and was able to win it fairly handily.

AIMS: The main philosophy that I am endorsing is that the society should develop its professional activities to the same extent, and in the same proportion, as it has developed its educational and scientific activities. I like to use the analogy of this being a stool. It doesn't sit well unless all the legs are the same length. It's simply a matter of giving the members the confidence that the society will be working for their interests as employes—since most chemists are employes—and providing the sort of services that will be useful to them in the development of the professional side of their careers. The publications of the society and the meetings they run are all supportive to the members in the educational and scientific sides of their careers.

SPECIFICALLY: The sort of things I am talking about are practical things such as providing employment assistance when members are looking for new jobs. We have always done a certain amount of this but more things have been done recently and can still be done. We can provide psychological as well as tangible backup to unemployed members. When a scientist is unemployed there is a definite psychological trauma that is perhaps more severe than with a lot of other occupations in

that the scientist identifies with his laboratory and his scientific problem—very often to the exclusion of almost everything else. When he loses his job, he's got no laboratory, no problem and there is a tremendous void created. He needs some psychological backup there and we should look into this.

Another area that the program would operate in is setting up a much stronger and improved method of backing up the chemist with respect to his relations with his employer. For instance, if a member feels he is being fired unjustly, or perhaps is being kept off a patent he feels he should be on, or if there is a dispute over publication rights, he could appeal to the society. The society would have people who could see to it that if people are fired they get the proper amount of severance pay. They could also work for improved vesting of pensions. If a person has worked for a company for all but two or five months to get his pension, the society could put some pressure on the company to make sure he gets it. Legal counsel is expensive but at least there would be legal advice available.

Another case would be to introduce an element of competition into the employment of chemists by rating employers with respect to a number of important parameters such as salary system, pay scale, fringe benefits, layoffs, etc.

SALARIES: When I say chemists I mean all the chemical engineers, biochemists, geochemists, etc. They are usually paid on a grid of dollars versus years of ex-

perience and merit. Where a person sits on this grid is usually determined by the management of the company. There is no input from peer groups, the people who probably know him better than the management. So, we advocate this sort of approach to salaries.

UNIONS: I am not antiunion at all, but as far as I am concerned, I think that if we do a good job as a professional organization there won't be any need for unions. There is a whole area here between the sort of rigid union type of employer-employee relationship and the laissez-faire which is completely in the hands of the employer.

EMPLOYMENT: Of course we are tremendously concerned about employment prospects, not only in the near term but in the far term. We are concerned about how do we best control the supply of chemists for the future so there isn't the excess we have at present. Contrarywise, how do we stimulate the demand for chemists?

I believe the situation we are now facing is due to the lack of a consistent employment policy on the part of the Government. I think it is really immoral what the Government is doing now. They are cutting out five percent of the personnel in all the laboratories. What the hell do these people do now? We've already got six percent unemployment. The honest thing to do, really, is to raise taxes and keep people working. Or do the same thing by changing the hours of work. I'm convinced this country can produce everything it needs on a 30-hour work week. We haven't changed the work week since 1937, and it was done then simply as a matter of creating more jobs. When you reduce the work week you are in effect taxing everybody across the board. In a way it doesn't matter how you do it but it is more dignified and psychologically satisfying if you do it by recognizing that there are not enough jobs for everybody and don't let six percent of the people take all the misery.

GOVERNMENT POLICY: I am very much disappointed at the President's message on research and development (SN: 3/25/72, p. 197). What he said, in effect, was that there will always be lots of work for scientists. This is wishful thinking. The Government must recognize its responsibility to do something about employment. For instance, last year we developed a bill for the California legislature. It was designed to put unemployed scientists into publicly owned laboratories with subsistence-type grants to let them do science rather than being out competing for the scarce, nonchemically related jobs with the rest of the public. The bill did

not pass but Rep. Ronald V. Dellums (D-Calif.) recently introduced in Congress the Scientific Manpower Act of 1972 that is designed to do the same thing on a Federal basis. We support this.

LIMITING THE NUMBER OF CHEMISTS:

There is no shortage of chemically related problems in the country (energy, pollution, health, etc.). So, it isn't that, it is a matter of how much and how soon the citizens (and Congress) are going to tax themselves to fund the sort of work that is needed to solve these problems. It may be 1985 before things get back in balance. So we need to maintain a continuing study of this situation. On the other hand, unless somebody does something about the number of jobs soon, the alternative is for the society to work in the direction of controlling the number of chemists produced. This is being done right now and has always been done to some extent by controlling the standards of admission and graduation in the universities. These are set by individual departments and the departments are accredited by the ACS. This, however, can be done more deliberately and be based on projected demands. In the past the ACS didn't exercise any leadership in this at all. There was no thought of what the graduates would do after they were produced. Part of the program is to set up a system so that we are continually conscious of what might be happening down the road a way.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS: Our charter requires that we provide a certain amount of public service. We haven't really carried this out the way we should. There is a department in the ACS administrative structure called the department of chemistry and public affairs. Its idea is that we should be seeking out areas in the public where we can provide service. We have produced, for instance, a report on the chemical basis of environmental problems. One of the things we would do in this program is be sure there is enough money to produce a second such report. In other areas we could create public service corporations that manage Federal laboratories for drug or environmental studies. In such places you need somebody outside the Federal Government (which is regulatory) and outside industry (which has vested interests).

SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT: Chemistry, of course, has a tremendous effect on society—mainly through industry. Over the years industry has used chemistry, but not necessarily in social ways and chemists have not been encouraged and supported to speak out when they saw antisocial things happening through chemistry. This is one of the things

we can achieve by providing this sort of base. The society has the responsibility of organizing itself so that it provides a base of support for its members and encourages them to act out and speak out on social issues. This is really the tangible way that it has of reacting with society.

LICENSING: One of the things we are going to look into is the desirability or otherwise of licensing of chemists. The only excuse for this is that the activities chemists carry out could be harmful to the public. But if we went into this there would be no point unless all chemists whose work might in any way affect the public were licensed. If that could be achieved then it would be best to have Federal licensing. Built into this I would like to see limited term licensing, say for 10 years. In order to maintain the license there would be a required sabbatical leave and study period. The chemist would have to go back to school.

IMPLEMENTATION AND SUPPORT: There will be a voluntary contribution of \$10 per member to support a three-year program of professionalism. I have done a survey of the membership and, on the basis of those that did answer, about 72 percent are supportive. Both the board of directors and the members of the council have voted on and passed this resolution.

OPPOSITION: Of course my contention that the society has this responsibility to its members doesn't meet with universal agreement. There are two classes of people in general who are opposed: those who feel they have policy-making management jobs in industry and the academicians who feel it is a matter of style that the society be kept pure and undefiled. Some of these people tend not to support the program, but I think if they really look into their souls they would find that they are not being very objective. The people who are presently opposed will perhaps come around when they see I don't have horns.

THE FUTURE: I am president-elect and have been in for three months. So far I have gotten this first step—getting some money to get this program started. I'll be president next year and then as immediate past president I'll still be on the board of directors. So, I'll really have a three-year stretch, and I think this is sort of a wave of the future. We are not going to turn back from this. It isn't just a transitory thing. We are designing a mode of operation for the society that is going to continue. There just isn't going to be the possibility to turn it off and go back to the more laissez-faire days. □