

A record number of 6000 scientists had registered for the AAAS Meeting in Boston, and the Organisers were correct in choosing problems of contemporary society for discussion at the main symposia, but they lacked the foresight as to the distribution of the audiences. A vast ballroom with seats for 2000 had an audience of perhaps one dozen elderly members, where the subject was ‘Engineering and Management skills developed by the Space Program’. For a talk by the famous anthropologist Dr Margaret Mead, an ordinary room for about 200 had been scheduled, but it was soon overflowing and, as more and more tried to enter, riot-like scenes broke out. Strong detachments of security guards barred entry and harassed officials tried to calm down the crowds by promising a repeat lecture by Dr Mead.

The discussion after Dr Mead’s lecture centred on pollution and hunger in the midst of plenty, as well as the many social evils of the affluent American society. These were debated hotly, emotionally and scientifically, and both from the platform and the floor, indictments were hurled at the United States Congress and at the scientific establishment to allow protein deficiency diseases among the children of American Indians and, in certain places, an infant mortality as high as 51 per 1000, worse than in many underdeveloped countries.

Pollution came also under severe criticism with 7 million cars junked each year, 25000 million glass bottles and 50000 million aluminium cans to be got rid off. Margaret Mead said: “If America wanted to play the political part in the world she wanted to assume, we cannot isolate ourselves from the rest of the world and we have to show that there is no longer any hunger and malnutrition in the USA.” My report was published as “Call for National Body to fight US Pollution”. It was a politically soothing line! (32 CC)

This AAAS Meeting was of great significance, as it showed the beginning of world-wide and wide-spread anti-science feeling. I had of course come across it in individuals, but never before in large and vehement groups. Many in Boston proclaimed their convictions by wearing convention buttons of a blue Earth with the phrase “Love it or leave it”. I discussed this anti-science movement with a learned professor who compared it with the Anti-Christ movement of the Middle Ages. When Martin Luther (1483-1546) equated the Pope with Anti-Christ, it greatly contributed to the Reformation, and one was forced to question if the existing scientific establishment was not also ripe for a reformation. I found this an interesting thought and relevant to the period.

I was back in London on 3 January 1970 after nearly 12 weeks on American territory. The year 1969 had indeed been an *annus mirabilis* for me, having travelled more than 181000 kilometers. [See Title 169]

Back to Synopsis

To... Science in London - My taste in cars. Title 205.