

ISR 5/3 *America's Technological Decline* Title 293

I attended the Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in San Francisco in January 1980 and listened to the Keynote address by Dr Simon Ramo, America's foremost engineer and industrialist. I was fortunate enough to publish his lecture in September 1980 in ISR. Dr Ramo, a co-founder of TRW Inc. [The R stands for Ramo in TRW] is a recipient of the National Medal of Science and was Chairman of the Executive Committee of TRW, Chairman of the President's Committee on Science and Technology, and a founder-member of the National Academy of Engineering. His views on American technology, though sad, could not have been more authoritative:

I had two opportunities to judge American technology in great depth and was deeply impressed by its strength and its achievements. The first opportunity arose when writing the ITU book *From Semaphore to Satellite* [see Title 69] when I travelled across the United States to study the history of its telecommunications. The second chance for me was to follow the whole of the Apollo Saga from the beginning to the end [see Titles 163 and 243]—no greater technological zenith was imaginable. To listen only ten years later to Dr Ramo's pessimistic account was sad indeed, but I agreed fully.

Dr Ramo concluded that the US position of science and technology was deteriorating and that in consequence unacceptable economic, social and political repercussions would arise in the following decade, the 1980s, not only in the USA, but the whole world. The reasons for the severe slip in technology, he found in inflation, wrong tax policies, too low an investment rate and over-regulation for which he blamed the US Government. Dr Ramo had not noticed any deterioration in the basic inventive talents of Americans.

He suggested as a realistic approach, that in the USA science and technology would serve the interests of society best, if both free enterprise and government participated jointly in this endeavour. The most effective results would be achieved if clearly defined roles most suitable for each area were assigned to the two sectors.

Dr Ramo was against a concentration on a list of most attractive possibilities of technological advances, but rather he pleaded for a focussing on the non-technological social-economic-political factors, the patterns of decision-making and government-private sector relations, which are the controlling parameters in America. He concluded with the wish that the USA make this a guiding policy for the 1980s, because then America would see the implementation of a much wider range of the right technological developments, as for example a synthetic fuel program.

I do not know if his no doubt excellent advice has been followed, as I have not visited the USA as frequently as I did previously.

Back to Synopsis

To .. ISR Volume 5 and Volume 6 - ISR 5/4 *Nuclear Waste Disposal - Gorleben*. Title 294