

Party for Chris Anfinsen 10/24/72

We are trained as scientists to believe that a healthy disrespect for the authority of pre-existing knowledge is an intellectual requirement for great scientific achievement. It is an unfortunate fact that we are not trained to extend that kind of disrespect to our nonscientific concerns. And if occasionally, facts force us to question nonscientific authority, many of us ask the questions and then stop--for a variety of usually irrelevant and rather embarrassing reasons. In a research institution that is part of the enormous bureaucracy of the U. S. Government such situations do in fact arise. The methods and needs of a large bureaucracy are, by and large, antithetical to those of scientists. Nevertheless, most of us who work here manage to conduct our research without a day to day awareness of the fact that we are part of an enormous bureaucracy. It is interesting to ask how NIH managed to develop this special ambience, which distinguishes it from other Federal enterprises. The answer of course is that there are many reasons. But one among the reasons has been the presence of various individuals whose healthy disrespect of authority is not limited to the authority of scientific knowledge and whose regard for their own necks appears remarkably ambivalent. Chris is one such person, perhaps the leading one if for no other reason than he has been at it a long time--since he arrived here in 1950.

In 1956, 15 years ago about to the day, when the undignified and restrictive atmosphere of the McCarthy era still pervaded the U. S. Government, a petition written by Linus Pauling, and appealing for a ban on the testing of nuclear weapons on primarily scientific grounds, including biological hazards, was circulated at NIH. No Hatch Act violations were involved in this nonpartisan effort. Nevertheless, various authorities here decided that it was not appropriate for NIH scientists to have the opportunity to read and sign, if

they wished, this document. Chris, then Chief of the Laboratory of Cellular Physiology and Metabolism in the National Heart Institute went to Dr. Shannon, then head of NIH, on behalf of the whole community and talked with him--as a result of that talk the confiscated petitions were returned and the civil rights of the whole community were affirmed.

Divergence between the views of administrative authority and the working scientists is not restricted to political matters. Over the past decade, the nature and the existence of the Research Associates Program has been a disputed subject. Chris, who has been the Director of that program since it's beginning, again served as spokesman for the scientific community--arguing yearly for the importance of the tutorial program both for the Research Associates and the scientific staff.

As President of the American Society of Biological Chemists in 1971-72 Chris represented a large segment of the scientific community by publicly urging that the National Cancer Institute retain ties to NIH. And in the same capacity he organized the first official action by the Society regarding equal employment opportunities in biochemistry for women and for minorities.

Chris' concern for the freedom of scientists, again aided immeasurably by his belief in the thickness of his own neck, was instrumental in a story told on the first page of the Washington Post last week. I refer to the action of the National Academy of Sciences in raising for discussion with its Soviet colleagues, the matter of the freedom of scientists in the Soviet Union.

Chris, we are all proud and happy that your work has received this great international recognition--it does not detract from our admiration of what you have achieved as a scientist to tell you that that pride and happiness is enhanced because of who you are in this community.