



THE SECRET HISTORY
OF
SCIENCE'S POSTWAR ELITE



THE JASONS

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schools where physicists talk about their own research and ask questions about others', neither Drell nor the students would back down and the whole school closed down for the summer. Still another time Drell visited Berkeley, and this time the activists took up Drell's offer: "I would give a physics seminar and then afterwards I would stay and we would discuss Vietnam. And that happened. I said, 'I'm willing to talk about Vietnam and my concerns and my worries. But I'm not going to use political correctness as an admission to give a science lecture.' I said, 'That's fascism. It's nothing but fascism. I oppose it on any forum I see, whether from the right or the left. And I will not be part of it.'"

Murray Gell-Mann had a similar experience at the Collège de France in Paris. When he insisted on giving his lecture, the college administrators escorted him out of the lecture hall; a subsequent write-up of this event by the European activists said that Gell-Mann was "bodily expelled from the Institute." Charles Townes was attacked at a scientific conference in Italy; at the time he was only in the audience, and when he raised his hand and asked the chairman for permission to respond to the activists, the chairman said no. Later Townes wrote a letter to the chairman about the "great inconsistency of allowing people to come into the meeting who were not physicists, to criticize, and not to allow me to respond"; and the chairman wrote back saying Townes was right and apologizing. "He just got emotionally off track in that meeting," Townes said. "And that was some of what was going on in the Vietnamese War—'get rid of freedom of speech.'"

A French poster called "War Professors" listed more or less accurately the names of the Jasons and read, "Physicists! Do not let the war professors speak of 'pure' physics until they have denounced their participation in Jason and condemned publicly the American war crimes." Italian physicists circulated what they called the "Trieste letter," saying that Jasons had helped develop plastic

fragmentation bombs “aimed at producing cripples” and laser-guided bombs “used to destroy North Vietnamese dikes”; the letter demanded a discussion at a scientific meeting of “the ‘neutrality’ of science and the role of institutional science in the military-industrial complex of the big powers.” Several Jasons wrote back saying that Jason had helped develop neither plastic fragmentation bombs nor laser-guided bombs. A French physicist replied, “Imagine a discussion on the chemists who advised the Nazis as to which gas to use in the gas-chambers,” arguing about the distinction “between those who work on ‘cyclon A’; and those who work on ‘cyclon B.’” Dyson wrote, “If you sincerely want to bring the war in Viet-nam to an end, you will not waste your time and energy in disrupting scientific meetings. Such disruptions may be satisfying to your ego but they have no effect on the war.”

The worst problems Jasons faced, however, were back home at two campuses, one of which was the University of California at Berkeley and centered around an activist physics professor. His name was Charles Schwartz and he was, I think, the only activist whose knowledge of Jason was personal. Schwartz had done his doctoral work in physics at MIT under the eminent Victor Weisskopf about the time that Oppenheimer was losing his clearances partly as a result of Teller’s testimony. It was clear to Schwartz then, as it was to many physicists, “that Oppenheimer was the angel and Teller was the devil.” Physicists’ views “just became papered on to me,” he said, because he wanted “to emulate and copy and to follow in their footsteps, if not overtake them.” Drell offered Schwartz a postdoctoral position at Stanford: “I essentially never had to sweat . . . about even looking for a job,” Schwartz said. “You know, the spoiled child.” The following year he was made assistant professor but was not given tenure. He then turned back to Weisskopf: “I cornered Viki and hollered ‘Get me a good job somewhere.’” He