

WASH. POST 3 SEPT. 53

Defense Dept. Called 'Blind' to New Arms

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Post Reporter

A leading weapons scientist warned yesterday Defense Department planners have a "blind spot" that is jeopardizing American security.



Berkner

Dr. Lloyd V. Berkner declared that the Defense Department, while competent to improve existing weapons and to employ new ones of demonstrated capability, "is singularly blind to the need for radical weapons suited to the new kinds of threats that have changed the character of war."

Dr. Berkner, widely known among Washington scientists for his service with the Carnegie Institution, the Navy, and with other Government agencies, is president of Associated Universities, Inc., which operates the Brookhaven National Laboratory at Upton, N. Y., for the Atomic Energy Commission.

His protest against military apathy to radical new weapons was made in a speech prepared for delivery to the seventh annual conference on administration of research, meeting at the University of California in Berkeley.

Dr. Berkner said an independent agency with authority to develop new weapons to the demonstration stage "might save the Nation untold destruction."

As things stand, he said, the Defense Department has "dictatorial power" in new-weapons development, and devotes major effort to weapons improvement "rather than toward the search for those things that could profoundly change our strategic situation."

"This tendency becomes extraordinarily critical at a time when we are vulnerable to terribly destructive weapons," he declared.

In proposing a new research agency for the development of radical new weapons, Dr. Berkner explained he was advancing the idea of "diversity of support" for basic research.

"Federal support of research

is here to stay whether we think it is good or bad," said Dr. Berkner. "I believe the support of research will benefit the community.

"But it is our job to see that Federal support of any part of the academic system does not encroach upon the freedom of thought and the scholarly search for truth that is fundamental both to teaching and to the development of new knowledge.

"The problem that we face is this: how can we retain the advantages of Federal support of research and education and still avoid the dangers of Federal control and threats to academic freedom. It is diversity of support that guarantees the freedom of thought and the untrammelled search for the truth.

"The dangers of Federal support are greatly lessened when the funds are administered by a variety of Government agencies. The most dangerous thing that could happen would be a concentration of all Federal support in any one agency . . ."

Dr. Berkner also sharply criticized prevailing emphasis upon secrecy in defense matters. "One can hardly understand the need for security with respect to a specific weapon," he said, "but the present craze for secrecy goes far beyond this.

"It is bad enough to deny to our own people information that is already in the hands, not only of friendly nations, but of those behind the Iron Curtain as well. It is outrageous to cover inaction and weakness by secrecy when disclosure would lead to public support of remedial measures.

"I view the mania for secrecy not simply as a danger to academic freedom, but as a national infection that is sapping our strength by concealing second-rate administration . . . by denying us the safeguards of swift progress that go with freedom of information; by subtly introducing Government control of new processes and thereby undermining our system of free enterprise; and, above all, by creating artificial barriers among men that stimulate the feelings of mistrust and hatred that are the seeds of war."