



William F. Buckley, Jr.

More on the countdown

The current issue of the Reader's Digest features an article by Charles J. V. Murphy called "Our Strategic-Arms Advantage is Fading Fast." Mr. Murphy was for many years with Fortune Magazine, and among the fields he specialized in was that of strategic arms. It was he who did the first definitive account of what happened at the Bay of Pigs; and, subsequently, it was he who documented that the great missile lag of 1960-1961 was not our own, but the Soviet Union's. It is his finding now, that the United States is at this moment somewhere between parity with the Soviet Union as a first class power, and a second class power. And any way you look at it we are in motion - down the scale towards the second rate.

Situation Worse

The current issue of National Review features an analysis by Charles Benson, identified only as a consultant for aeronautics firms, in which he reasons that the impending situation is a great deal worse than the public supposes. Not only are we behind, he says, but the defense we speak about - the ABM that squeaked through Congress last year - is simply not up to the burden imposed on it, of securing our Minuteman sites so as to prevent the Soviet Union from achieving a first-strike capability. Mr. Benson proposes a complex four-stage extension of Safeguard, which would knock down enemy missiles far away from shore.

Last week, in a television studio, I put the questions directly to Dr. Edward Teller, whose scientific achievements no one has ever questioned: and he said it very plainly. That the Soviet Union is fast moving towards a first-strike capacity, and that there is nothing the United States now has on the drawing boards that will change this. I asked him whether he was at liberty to reveal whether he (or anybody else he knew of) was at work on something this side of the drawing board, that might bail America out, an ace up America's sleeve. He replied that yes, he and others were at work on such a thing, but that he could not say "whether it would come up an ace, or a deuce." A deuce would not do.

And then Dr. Teller ventilated a complaint he feels very strongly. It is against scientific secrecy. The Soviet Union has secrecy and makes enormous scientific progress, to be sure. But, he says, if you are going to have secrecy, you need to have totalitarianism in order to justify secrecy. To have secrecy, in combination with freedom, is to mix two incompatible concepts.

Open Policy

Dr. Teller appears to favor giving out almost all of the scientific-military information which we now conceal. The principal argument for continuing to conceal it is that by divulging it, we notify the potential enemy that we have it, and he is then spurred on to speculate on how we managed

to get it. Dr. Teller grants that that is an argument, but disputes that the force of it is sufficient to overcome (except in special circumstances) arguments to the contrary. And anyway, he points out, we are here dealing in only one category of secret information. What about the others?

His conviction is that the United States Government, by systematically moving to

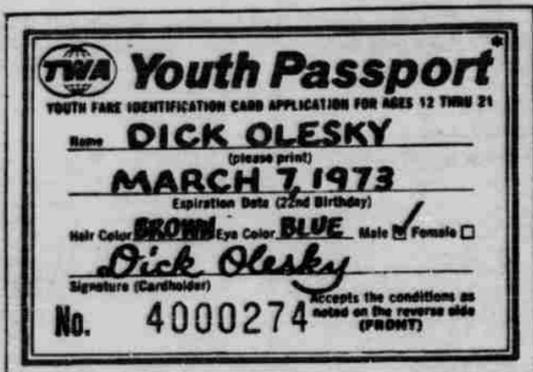
disclose what we know, would accomplish two things. The first is to circulate among scientists in the free world information that would greatly ease the work they are engaged in, cross-fertilizing ideas whence new and vital defensive weaponry could issue. Secondly, he believes that the spirit necessary to cause scientists to come to the aid of their country, would more easily generate out of a more

specific knowledge of what are the problems we face. It is unlikely that the United States, if it actually knows where we are headed, will fail to generate the political pressure necessary to cause the Administration and the Congress to behave energetically. And that same pressure, one hopes, would ignite in the scientists of the west something of the will to perform that caused them to work so effectively in the war

against Hitler.

I do not see that Mr. Nixon can defer for much longer a face-to-face session with the American public on the points here touched on. Either that, or produce the ace up our sleeve. Meanwhile we have Dr. Teller's word for it that it might come up a deuce: on which Mr. Nixon, the poker-player, would never put great reliance.

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