

EDWARD CONDON AND THE COLD WAR POLITICS OF LOYALTY

Early in the cold war, a noted scientist was relentlessly hounded
by red-baiting congressmen. The lessons of the case
remain no less relevant today.

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On 1 March 1948, the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) fired the opening shot in what was then the most public cold war political attack on a scientist. On that day, HUAC chairman J. Parnell Thomas (R-N.J.), recovering from gastrointestinal hemorrhages, but still suffering from a chronic case of political theater, issued a report from his sickbed that labeled Edward Uhler Condon, renowned physicist and director of the National Bureau of Standards (NBS), "one of the weakest links in our atomic security." Thomas's allegations immediately made headlines across the nation. For physicists, the news confirmed that the binding of the cold war to the nuclear age had extended the anticommunist search for the disloyal and subversive into their community.

American physicists' rise to political prominence during and after World War II developed in tandem with the nation's ascendance to superpower status. The emergence of the cold war and the ever-increasing demands of national security assured physicists of continued visibility and influence. But those same conditions also brought severe restrictions on physicists' freedom of action. As domestic anticommunism reemerged after World War II, protection of classified scientific information became a national priority, and scientists' specialized knowledge a carefully guarded commodity. Secrecy and security requirements, originally temporary wartime measures, became permanent features of physicists' lives. Scientists who advocated arms control, international cooperation in science, greater US-Soviet accommodation, civil rights, labor unionism, and other causes outside the circumscribed boundaries of cold war politics soon found their political commitments closely scrutinized for evidence of subversive intent.

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Politically active scientists ran a variety of risks during the postwar red scare. Those scientists working on classified projects could be denied security clearance and the ability to pursue their research. Under the federal loyalty program, all government employees—scientists included—had to obtain loyalty clearance or lose their jobs. Congressional committees such as HUAC or, later, Joseph McCarthy's Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, as well as state-level investigative committees, pursued the political advantages of probing individual scientists for evidence of disloyalty and red-baiting those they found wanting. The hunt for atom spies and other enemies within, both real and imagined, continued to spread during the early 1950s. Many American universities joined the anticommunist purge by adopting their own loyalty standards, and firing and blacklisting scientists and other academics who failed to cooperate with congressional and state-level antisubversion efforts. By then, scientists also faced increased prospects of being denied grants for nonsecret research or travel rights by the State Department if they insisted on openly challenging cold war orthodoxy.

Condon's unabashed liberalism, energetic advocacy of arms control and internationalism in science, and high-level government profile placed him on a collision course with HUAC during the formative years of the red scare. For Condon, confrontation with HUAC meant years of public scrutiny and political harassment. For science as a whole, his ordeal exemplified the larger struggles between science and politics that became a part of physicists' lives during the cold war era.

A life in science and politics

Physicists often remark on the obscurity of their discipline before the 1940s. As Richard Feynman once quipped, "In those days, people hardly knew what a physicist was." But by the 1920s, as the industrial employment of physicists expanded, physics had already become more than an arcane intellectual specialty. At that time, the best young physicists still went to Europe to round out their education, but by the 1930s, the Rockefeller Foundation's decade-long investment in the National Research Council (NRC) postdoctoral fellowships had paid off, and American physics could realistically claim parity with

JOINING WESTINGHOUSE IN 1937, Condon left the world of academic research and began a successful career as a research director.

that of Europe. With the rise of fascism and the migration of many of Europe's best physicists to the US, the quality of American physics rose even higher. Then World War II thrust massive amounts of federal resources into physicists' hands. Wartime military advancements, including radar and the atomic bomb, dramatically demonstrated the ability of science to uphold US power and, for physicists, ushered in a new age of generous government contracts, high-level advisory positions, and public prominence.

Condon's life and career epitomized this profound transformation. Condon was born on 2 March 1902 in Alamogordo, New Mexico—an irony not lost on him in his later years. He delighted in telling the story of a suspicious senator who wanted to know how he had come to be born so close to the Trinity test site. Condon grew up in the San Francisco area, where he flirted briefly with a career in journalism before going to college and studying physics at the University of California at Berkeley. After earning his PhD in 1926, he went to Göttingen and Munich on an NRC fellowship for postdoctoral training. He returned to the US to take up a lectureship at Columbia University before becoming an assistant professor at Princeton University in 1928. After spending the next year at the University of Minnesota, he returned to Princeton, where he stayed until 1937.

Condon established his reputation in theoretical physics with two discoveries near the beginning of his career. His doctoral dissertation elaborated on James Franck's theory of molecular transitions. The resulting Franck–Condon principle, which holds that electronic transitions occur so rapidly that one can assume, as an approximation, stability in the position and momentum of nuclei, has numerous applications in chemistry and physics. Then in 1928, Condon and Ronald Gurney proposed a quantum tunneling interpretation of alpha particle emission. George Gamow developed the same idea independently, and the discovery constituted a significant theoretical breakthrough in understanding radioactive decay.

Popular mythology among physicists holds that they do their best work before the age of 30. But in 1936, Condon demonstrated that he still possessed formidable scientific skills. That year, Condon, Gregory Breit, and Richard Present developed an important interpretation of proton–proton scattering. In a career that ultimately spanned five decades, Condon published more than 90 papers in such diverse fields as atomic physics, solid-state physics, and the physics of microwaves and radio waves. He also cowrote several well-known textbooks, including the first English-language textbook on quantum mechanics (with Philip Morse in 1929), and the classic *The Theory of Atomic Spectra* (with G. H. Shortley in 1936).

Daunted by the breakneck pace of discoveries in theoretical physics, Condon briefly considered a career in public relations at Bell Laboratories when he returned

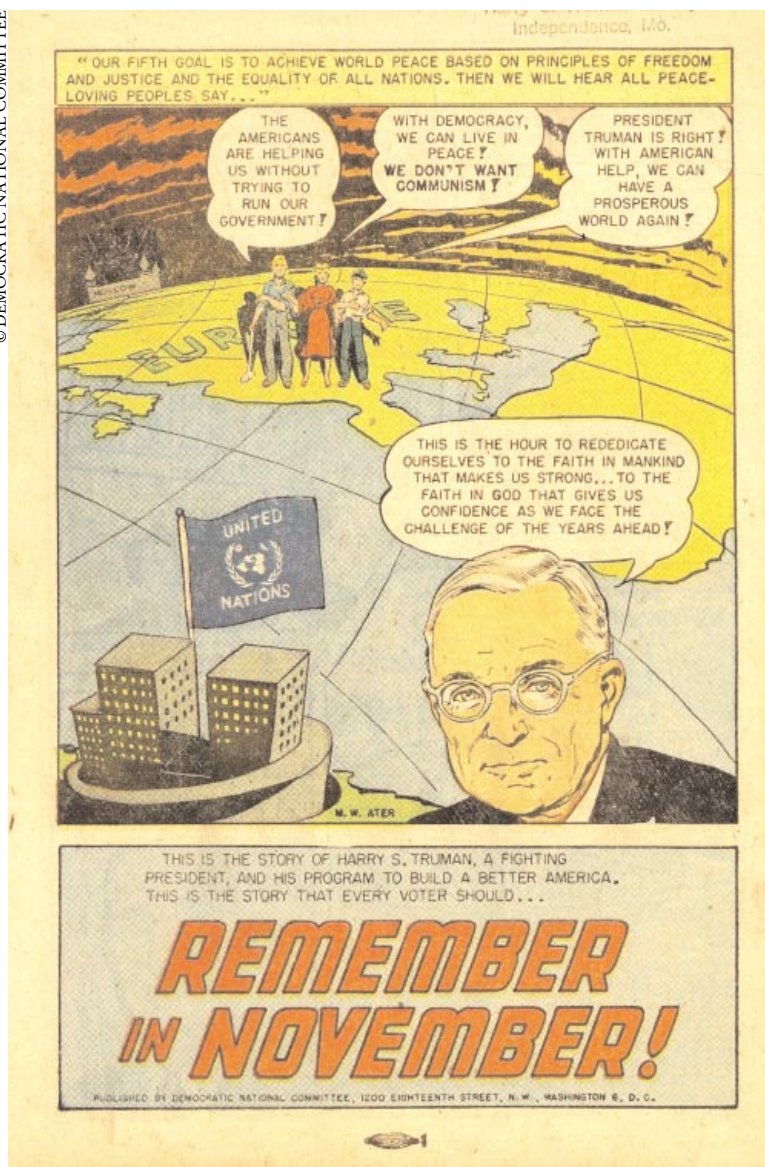


AIP EMILIO SEGRE VISUAL ARCHIVES

from Munich in 1927. Perhaps the possibility of industrial science never remained far from his mind, for in 1937, he left Princeton to become associate director of research at Westinghouse Electric Co. There he established a research program in nuclear physics, solid-state physics, and mass spectroscopy. In 1940, he took charge of Westinghouse's fledgling program in microwave radar, which soon led to war research.

In the fall of 1940, Condon began to work full-time on military projects. As a consultant to the National Defense Research Committee, he helped to organize the radiation laboratory at MIT, which pursued the development of radar. In 1943, he joined the Manhattan Project as J. Robert Oppenheimer's assistant director, but clashed with General Leslie R. Groves, the project's military leader, over security policy and the state of living conditions at Los Alamos. After only six weeks, Condon resigned. He did, however, continue to contribute to the project as a part-time consultant on uranium separation at Berkeley. When the war ended, he became director of the NBS and committed himself to a career in physics and government.

Condon's life reflected not only the general institutional trends of physics in the first half of the 20th century, but also the political concerns of the Manhattan Project generation. His political sympathies ran to the left of New Deal liberalism with a strong civil libertarian bent, but his political involvement was limited during the 1930s. He became politically active after the war, when he devoted himself to speaking out about atomic energy,



security and secrecy requirements, and international cooperation in science. He became a leading figure in the atomic scientists' movement, composed of former Manhattan Project scientists who sought to teach the public about the dangers of the nuclear age, influence domestic atomic energy legislation, and push for international control of atomic energy. Condon aided the atomic scientists' opposition to the May-Johnson bill, which contained strict secrecy regulations and placed atomic energy under military control, and he and Leo Szilard helped to spearhead the scientists' case that atomic energy should be under civilian, not military, authority.

Through these activities, Condon met Secretary of Commerce and former Vice-President Henry A. Wallace, who pushed his appointment as director of the NBS in the fall of 1945. Condon also became a technical adviser to the Senate Special Committee on Atomic Energy, and he helped to draft the McMahon act. Passed in August 1946, the act mandated civilian control of atomic energy under the auspices of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC).

Condon described himself as a liberal. He believed in the ability of humans to act generously and rationally, and he was impatient with small-minded or self-serving opin-

FOR PRESIDENT TRUMAN'S 1948 election campaign, the Democratic National Committee produced a 16-page comic book depicting Truman's life and political philosophy. This last page illustrates Truman's effort to identify peace and prosperity with a US-led anticommunist international order.

ion. His politics centered on an internationalist ideal that envisioned open communication in science as a way of furthering both scientific progress and international harmony. Condon contended that secrecy could not be relied on to preserve scientific and technological advantages, since scientists in other countries would inevitably reproduce US discoveries. Furthermore, efforts to monopolize information created a sense of suspicion damaging to international relations. Given the dangers of the nuclear age and the unacceptable costs of nuclear conflict, the only sensible course of action lay in open scientific cooperation among nations to create goodwill and spread the benefits of science worldwide. If an internationalist course were followed, Condon predicted in 1946, "the outcome will be world friendship and cooperation and not atomic war and the destruction of civilization." As the cold war progressed, he increasingly lamented the rise of anticommunist hysteria and its attendant obsession with atomic secrets. In part, Condon's discouragement reflected his personal experiences, for it was his internationalism that led to his confrontations with HUAC in the late 1940s.

Thomas finds a target

HUAC's decision to target Condon was not hasty or accidental. Thomas had been one of the most bitter congressional opponents of civilian control of atomic energy, and he had deployed the specter of communism in an effort to derail the McMahon bill. In June 1946, as the House began to debate the atomic energy legislation, HUAC began to investigate the political activities of the scientists' movement at Oak Ridge National Laboratory. Shortly afterward, in *Liberty* magazine, Thomas fired a broadside against the nation's scientists and their political entanglements: "Our scientists, it seems, are well schooled in their specialties but not in the history of Communist tactics and designs. They have a weakness for attending meetings, signing petitions, sponsoring committees, and joining organizations labeled 'liberal' or 'progressive' but which are actually often Communist fronts." He went on to cite the opposition of individual scientists to secrecy requirements and military control of atomic energy as evidence of their naiveté and unreliability, insisting that many atomic scientists were under communist influence.

Weeks later, as the McMahon bill approached a House vote, Thomas carried his campaign against civilian control of atomic energy to the House floor. There, he focused not only on the specific provisions of the bill itself, but also on its advocates, including Condon. He also hinted darkly at the reasons behind the last-minute revocation of Condon's passport in 1945, just before the scientist had planned to leave for the Soviet Union's celebration of

the 220th anniversary of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Anxious Manhattan Project security officers had indeed revoked the passport, but without prejudice to Condon's loyalty or security status. Thomas, however, insinuated that the incident demonstrated the unreliability of the McMahon bill's supporters.

The passage of the McMahon act on 1 August failed to damp Thomas's determination to exploit the threat of atomic espionage. After the 1946 midterm elections gave the Republicans a majority in the House, Thomas ascended to the chairmanship of HUAC. In that position, he faced the problem of building the power and prestige of what at that point was a relatively weak and disreputable committee. Before the investigation and prosecution of Alger Hiss, HUAC garnered little respect, even within Congress. Most congressmen looked on the committee with distaste if not contempt, and new House members avoided assignment to HUAC.

It was not until after Richard M. Nixon (R-Calif.) demonstrated through the Hiss case that one could build a successful political career on red-baiting that freshman congressmen clamored to sit on HUAC. But at the outset of the 80th Congress, Thomas needed more immediate means of expanding his committee's sway. As part of an eight-point program that included ferreting out Hollywood leftists and communists within the labor movement, Thomas quickly announced HUAC's intent to investigate "those groups and movements which are trying to dissipate our atomic bomb knowledge for the benefit of a foreign power."

Thomas had not forgotten Condon's role in the McMahon bill. As he set HUAC on its new agenda, he launched a series of media trial balloons concerning Condon. Late in March 1947, the *Washington Times-Herald* published two articles, based on information from Thomas, that probed Condon's ties to organizations HUAC considered communist fronts. In the June 1947 issue of *American Magazine*, Thomas attacked Condon more openly for his membership in the American-Soviet Science Society. ASSS had been founded during the days of the US-Soviet alliance in World War II to promote and facilitate the exchange of openly available scientific information. There was nothing subversive about the organization, but Thomas portrayed it as a conduit for Soviet-sponsored atomic espionage. Then in July, the *Times-Herald* announced HUAC's plans to subpoena Condon and grill him about what the article insinuated were numerous questionable contacts.

By then, Condon felt something had to be done. He appealed to Congressman Chet Holifield (D-Calif.), a friend of the atomic scientists during the McMahon bill debate and a member of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, to launch a counterattack. On 22 July, Holifield took to the House floor, where he defended the NBS director with a point-by-point analysis that took apart the *Times-Herald's* case against Condon. He concluded by emphasizing Condon's scientific stature and challenging "rumor-mongering character assassins" to "put up or shut up." Holifield's speech seemed to put the matter to rest, but months later, Condon discovered that the events of 1947 had only been a prelude of what was to come.

Cause célèbre

The case broke open on 1 March 1948, when HUAC issued its report with the infamous charge that Condon was "one of the weakest links in our atomic security." Space does not permit a detailed description of the allegations against Condon here, but most of the committee's suspi-

cions centered on either his liberal political views or his associations with persons HUAC considered overly left-wing and insufficiently loyal. The report tried to portray Condon as untrustworthy and suspect because of the pending status of his security clearance with the AEC, his association with "an individual alleged, by a self-confessed Soviet espionage agent, to have engaged in espionage activities," his general associations with foreigners, and his connection to ASSS. In conclusion, the report recommended either that Condon be fired or that the Secretary of Commerce specifically justify why Condon should be kept on the job despite the evidence against him.

To the casual reader, the charges might have sounded serious, but on closer examination, they carried little weight. For example, Condon's security clearance was "pending" merely because of a routine backlog at the AEC. At no point did HUAC charge Condon with any specific impropriety or unlawful action. Instead, the report could only dredge up vague "associations"—with foreigners, with radicals, including an alleged spy, and with scientifically based political causes—all normal encounters for a liberal, politically active scientist and head of a major federal bureau. As one commentator noted at the time, HUAC's most serious allegations amounted to "saying that Condon is alleged to have associated with a man who is alleged to beat his wife." By citing supposedly dangerous "associations," HUAC could cast Condon in a subversive light without having to accuse him of any actual indiscretion or involvement in intrigue.

The report's remarks about the ASSS revealed the true source of the committee's ire: Condon's internationalism. The report claimed that Condon's membership in the ASSS revealed "the dangerous extremes to which Dr. Condon has gone in an effort to cooperate with Communist forces in the United States." In specifying what those extremes were, HUAC pointed to Condon's remarks in a 5 March 1946 address, in which the physicist had emphasized the need for scientific cooperation between the US and the Soviet Union. To most scientists, Condon's words were reasonable, but to Thomas, scientific exchanges by themselves were tantamount to espionage.

The allegations made front-page headlines around the country, and Condon immediately responded to what promised to escalate into a major confrontation with HUAC. He declared, "I have nothing to report. If it is true that I am one of the weakest links in atomic security that is very gratifying and the country can feel absolutely safe for I am completely reliable, loyal, conscientious and devoted to the interests of my country, as my whole career and life clearly reveal." Off the record, he described his predicament more colorfully: "How can a man answer a charge like that? If you say I've got a wart on my nose, I can deny it. But if you just say I'm one of the ugliest men in town, all I can do is argue that I'm really quite pretty."

The Commerce Department quickly backed Condon by announcing that its loyalty board had cleared the NBS director on 24 February. A wide range of prominent people and organizations also rallied behind Condon. Over the next several months, the American Civil Liberties Union, Wallace, Congresswoman Helen Gahagan Douglas (D-Calif.), and Holifield voiced their support. Scientists and scientists' groups also spoke out in his defense. Albert Einstein and Harold Urey, speaking on behalf of the Emergency Committee of Atomic Scientists, pronounced HUAC's accusations "a disservice to the interests of the United States." Robert Marshak, chairman of the Federation of American Scientists (FAS), lambasted HUAC for laying a "deliberate smear" against Condon "contrary to the Ameri-



PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON invited Condon to the White House on 1 August 1966 to mark the 20th anniversary of the McMahon act, whose passage Condon had campaigned for.

can instinct for fair play and to the democratic idea expressed in the Bill of Rights.” The FAS also urged its members to write to the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, HUAC, and the Commerce Department to express their support for Condon. President Harry S Truman received scores of telegrams and letters from individual scientists, physics departments, and scientific societies exuding confidence in the embattled scientist. The American Physical Society issued a statement backing Condon on 5 March. The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) followed suit in late April, and the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), in mid-May. Meanwhile, the Emergency Committee of Atomic Scientists held a testimonial dinner on 12 April to demonstrate scientists’ faith in Condon. Some 150 scientists, including nine Nobel Prize winners and 70 NAS members, endorsed the dinner.

The Condon case and partisan politics

Thomas’s opposition to the McMahon bill, disdain for scientific internationalism, and political interest in atomic espionage explain the general motivations behind HUAC’s attack on Condon, but not its immediate political concerns. Condon’s supporters feared a renewed assault on the McMahon bill, but a congressional sense of turf prevented HUAC from taking further steps to dismantle civilian control of atomic energy. As Richard Meier of FAS observed on 24 March, “J. Parnell Thomas is pretty much hindered in the atomic energy field because he is intruding on the jurisdiction of another committee, and one that guards its domain quite jealously.” HUAC simply lacked

the clout to take on the powerful and prestigious Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. But even if the McMahon act were sacrosanct, the Condon case still offered HUAC attractive possibilities.

First, the case provided a rationale for HUAC’s record \$200 000 appropriations request for 1949—double the previous year’s budget. As one congressman noted, “A sure sign of preparations for making a new request for funds is the release of sensational charges against some public figure.” During the ensuing debate in the House, a number of congressmen spoke in defense of Condon and sharply criticized HUAC. Despite such criticisms, however, the growing US commitment to the cold war redounded to HUAC’s favor. An overwhelming majority in the House voted to approve the committee’s expanded budget.

In the election year of 1948, Republicans also hoped to capitalize on the weakness of a president who seemingly lacked his predecessor’s capacity to capture Americans’ devotion. The furor surrounding Condon might have died down relatively quickly, but the political stakes increased significantly when a prolonged controversy erupted over a 1947 letter from Secretary of Commerce Averell Harriman to FBI director J. Edgar Hoover. Prompted by either the implementation of the federal loyalty program in March 1947 or Thomas’s early trial balloons in the *Times-Herald*, Harriman wrote to Hoover on 6 May 1947 to request “all available information in the files of the Federal Bureau of Investigation” regarding Condon. Hoover responded on 15 May with a confidential letter.

As was typical of such correspondence, Hoover provided a detailed synopsis of uncorroborated accounts, supplied by confidential informants, of those activities and associations of Condon’s that the FBI considered potentially suspect. HUAC obtained excerpts from the letter, and in its report on Condon quoted the sections that seemed the most damning. In particular, the committee focused on the following statement: “The files of the Bureau reflect that Dr. Edward U. Condon has been in contact as late as 1947 with an individual alleged, by a self-confessed Soviet espionage agent, to have engaged in espionage activities with the Russians in Washington, DC from 1941 to 1944.” But HUAC omitted the sentence that immediately followed: “There is no evidence to show that contacts between this individual and Dr. Condon were related to this individual’s espionage activities.” The critical omission created an impression of guilt rather than exoneration, but the Commerce Department apparently leaked the excised passage to the media and thereby deflated the most spectacular of HUAC’s allegations.

Furious, the committee demanded that Truman release the full text of the Hoover–Harriman letter. The president, in an effort to maintain control over anticommunism as a political issue, responded on 14 March with an executive order forbidding the release of departmental loyalty files to Congress on the grounds it would violate the civil rights of federal employees and compromise the FBI’s investigative capabilities. Ten days later, Harriman evoked executive privilege and refused to hand over his department’s records on Condon. On 22 April, the House, outraged by Truman’s willingness to defy the legislative

branch, passed House Resolution 522, which ordered Truman to release the Commerce Department's loyalty file on Condon. Truman refused, and he ordered all copies of the Hoover-Harriman letter transferred to the Oval Office.

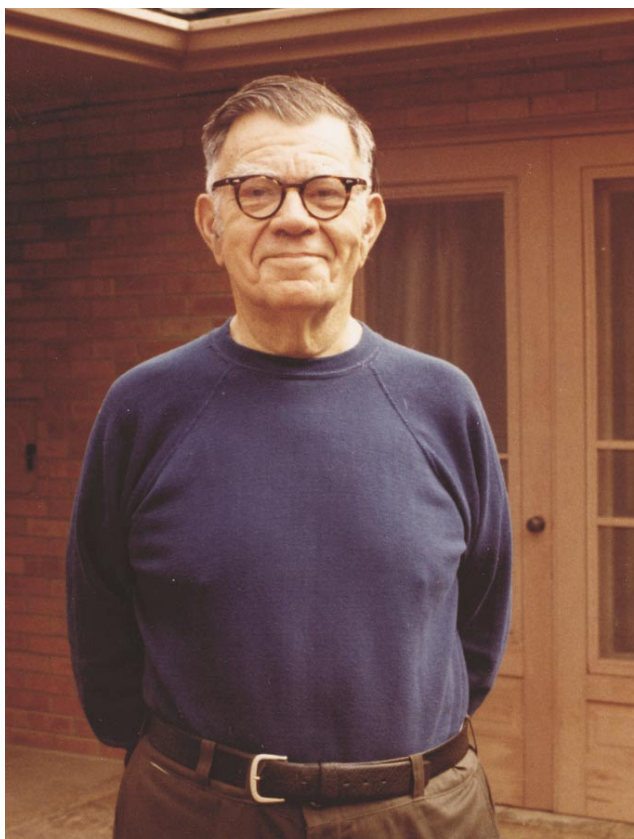
The resolution never came to a vote in the Senate, so the president had no legal obligation to divulge Condon's loyalty file. But the uproar threatened serious political fallout. Truman's actions became both a major source of criticism of the president and a defense for HUAC. Some of Condon's defenders had attacked HUAC on the grounds of basic fairness because of the committee's continued failure to grant Condon a hearing in which he could respond to the charges against him. With HR 522 as political cover, HUAC attempted to shift the blame to the Truman administration by asking what it had to hide and contending that if the president would only hand over HUAC's main source of evidence against Condon, the committee would be happy to give Condon an open hearing. As HUAC member Richard Vail (R-Ill.) put it, "What is there in the letter the President, the Attorney General, and Secretary Harriman desire to keep from the Congress?" As the House headed toward its vote on HR 522, Thomas indicated that the main obstacle to giving Condon a hearing lay in Truman's obstinate refusal to hand over the Hoover-Harriman letter.

On 1 May, Republican National Committee chairman Carroll Reece, sensing the election-year atmosphere, listed impeachment as one of several steps that Congress could take to force the issue. Condon, sensing the need for damage control, wrote to Undersecretary of Commerce William Foster on 5 May to ask that Truman release the letter. But Truman continued to hold firm, and on 1 June he drafted a speech to Congress detailing his reasons for refusing to comply with HR 522. By this time, however, the immediate controversy surrounding Condon had abated sufficiently, and the president's advisers suggested Truman need not deliver the speech. The president dropped the matter for the moment. Meanwhile, the AEC granted Condon a security clearance, noting, "After examining the extensive files in this case, the commission has no question whatever concerning Dr. Condon's loyalty to the United States."

Then, in the fall, Truman left no doubts about his support for his NBS director. At the centennial meeting of the AAAS on 13 September, four days before beginning his coast-to-coast whistle-stop tour for the presidential campaign, Truman greeted Condon on stage and blasted smears against scientists as "unfounded rumors, gossip and villification" that created an atmosphere that "is un-American, the most un-American thing we have to contend with today."

By the end of 1948, Condon appeared to have emerged from his confrontation with HUAC unscathed and victorious. Not only had he received loyalty clearance from the Commerce Department and security clearance from the AEC, but the president himself had publicly defended him. Furthermore, HUAC fared poorly at the polls, and two of its members lost their seats. Thomas won his congressional race but was indicted for payroll padding shortly thereafter. To Condon's delight, Thomas pleaded no contest, resigned from Congress in disgrace, and spent nine months in federal prison. Years later, Condon derived a certain gleeful satisfaction in always referring to the former HUAC chairman as "ex-convict Thomas."

But Thomas's removal from the political scene failed to end Condon's ordeal. Throughout the early 1950s, Condon had to defend himself repeatedly from HUAC's accusations and submit to cumbersome reassessment by the



AIP EMILIO SEGRE VISUAL ARCHIVES

AT THE AGE OF 72, Condon moved to Boulder, Colorado, in 1964 to become a professor of physics at the University of Colorado and a fellow of the Joint Institute of Laboratory Astrophysics. He died in Boulder on 26 March 1974.

federal government's loyalty and security apparatus. Vail revived HUAC's charges in April 1951. At the same time, in accordance with revisions in the federal government's loyalty program, Condon also faced a reevaluation of his loyalty clearance by the Commerce Department. Frustrated by the prospect of another wrenching political battle and attracted by a high-paying position at Corning Glass Works, Condon left the NBS in August.

Vail, however, continued to apply pressure. After Condon's ascension to the AAAS presidency in January 1952, Vail again attacked Condon's politics as "flagrantly pro-Soviet" and promised the forthcoming release of "additional and shocking material" that would "remove the last vestige of doubt concerning him and . . . thoroughly demoralize and confound his defenders." Then in late August, not long before the midterm congressional election, HUAC finally subpoenaed Condon for a hearing. Vail made his election-year motives explicit in his campaign literature, which touted HUAC's investigation of Condon as one of the primary accomplishments of his congressional career.

The 5 September hearing aired none of the shocking revelations that Vail had promised earlier. In six hours of testimony, most of which centered on old allegations rehashed from the committee's 1948 report, Condon answered all questions candidly and vehemently denied ever having violated security regulations. No evidence of wrongdoing on Condon's part emerged. Nevertheless, his troubles continued. In 1954, Condon applied for security

clearance for a classified project that Corning was conducting for the US Navy. He received clearance in June, but in October, after the *Washington Post* broke the story of Condon's successful application for access to classified information, the Secretary of the Navy suddenly revoked Condon's security clearance. Vice President Nixon, then campaigning in Montana, publicly took credit for the navy secretary's actions.

Condon initially gave every indication of being prepared to fight his case once more. After noting that he had been cleared four times by four different boards, he declared, "I will be pleased to be cleared a fifth time, confident that one more honest, objective review of my record can only lead to this result." But in December, tired of waging a seemingly endless battle, he gave up the fight, announcing, "I now am unwilling to continue a potentially indefinite series of reviews and re-reviews." Instead, Condon left Corning for university life.

His long struggle with cold war anticommunism followed him into academia, where the unofficial but powerful blacklist often prevented the hiring of people whose loyalty had been questioned. In January 1955, New York University invited Condon to chair its physics department, but rescinded the offer amid rumors that NYU would lose federal funding if it hired him. He spent the 1955 spring semester as a visiting professor at the University of Pennsylvania, but Thomas Gates, the new navy secretary as well as a university trustee, kept Condon from obtaining a permanent position. Instead, he became chairman of the physics department at Washington University in 1956. Chancellor Arthur Compton, the famed physicist, had a record of hiring faculty who had faced anticommunist political persecution, and after Condon joined the Washington University faculty, his troubles finally came to an end. Several years later, he went to the University of Colorado, where he completed his scientific career.

Condon's battle with HUAC left his career and reputation intact, but his experience with cold war anticommunism was nonetheless a sobering one. He did not suffer material consequences, such as long-term loss of employment, but the spiritual costs were high. His former student and friend Frederick Seitz later observed, "The ordeal took a heavy toll on him, both physically and emotionally. He was never again quite the same cheerful, carefree man I had known in earlier years."

For the American scientific community, the Condon case symbolized the difficulties scientists faced as they tried to straddle science and politics after World War II. Even after the waning of McCarthyism, scientists periodically received disturbing reminders of the political pressures that came with their dependence on federal support. In 1969, for example, shocked scientists learned that the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare regularly denied scientists appointments to advisory panels or positions in the Public Health Service because of their participation in civil rights demonstrations or antiwar protests. More recently, congressional charges of Chinese-sponsored espionage at Los Alamos, the Justice Department's botched handling of the Wen Ho Lee case, and the sour feeling both have left in particular among Asian and Asian American scientists in the US indicate the continued threat that the hunt for spies and scapegoats poses for American scientists. The lessons of the Condon case remain no less relevant today than they were over half a century ago, during those grim, dark days early in the cold war. ■