

# Gas and Germ Critic

Matthew Stanley Meselson

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In 1963, Dr. Matthew S. Meselson, a young but relatively well-known geneticist from Harvard, came to Washington to work for the summer as a consultant to the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. When he arrived, he was assigned to study European nuclear problems. But this seemed to him such a vast area — one in which he could contribute little of importance in a three-month period — that he asked to be reassigned to investigate the Government's chemical and biological warfare programs.

"I wrote one paper, and it was filed away some place and probably forgotten," Dr. Meselson said in a telephone interview today. "But I became deeply concerned about the problems."

As a result of this concern, Dr. Meselson spent at least half his time over the last six years working behind the scenes to bring about a change in the Government's policy on germ and chemical warfare.

#### Influence on President

There are many here in Washington and in the academic community who give Mr. Meselson more credit than any other individual in influencing the decision on chemical and biological warfare that President Nixon announced today.

Occasionally, Dr. Meselson made public appearances to state his case against germ and gas warfare. In 1965, he coordinated a petition against chemical and biological weapons, obtained the signatures of 5,000 scientists and delivered the petition to the Kennedy Administration.

This summer, in conjunction with the Salk Foundation he organized a conference on chemical and biological weapons in Cambridge. And earlier, he testified in closed session before the Senate

Foreign Relations Committee.

But, in the main, Dr. Meselson's work was quiet, undramatic and out of the public view.

He had a special avenue into the present Administration, having been a close friend and neighbor in Cambridge, Mass., of Henry A. Kissinger, the President's national security adviser.

Given complete access to material at the State Department, the Pentagon and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, Dr. Meselson developed as deep a background in germ and gas warfare as anyone in the country, and, with gentle and quiet persuasion, he was able to bring more and more government officials around to his view.

#### Calls Weapons Useless

"I took the approach of a military planner," he said in the interview. "I tried to persuade people that these weapons were useless, that they were intended to kill the population and we already had other weapons that could do that. The real hazard of lethal germs is that they can kill whole cities."

Matthew Stanley Meselson was born May 24, 1930, in Denver. He graduated from the University of Chicago in 1951 and received his doctorate from the California Institute of Technology in 1957. He has been on the faculty of Harvard since 1960 and has been a full professor of biology since 1964.

In 1957, while doing post-doctoral research at Cal Tech, Dr. Meselson, along with another young scientist, Frank Stahl, performed critical experiments showing how DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), the master chemical of life, replicates itself.

A thin and rather intense man, with dark hair, Dr. Meselson was married last summer to Sarah Page, who used to work in his laboratory. A previous, childless



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*Gently and quietly  
persuasive.*

marriage had ended in divorce.

He said today he was "pleased" to hear of the President's decisions on chemical and germ weapons. But he said he would continue his efforts to press for a strict Government policy on the use of tear gas and defoliants. "What is really needed," he said, "is a technical study with other nations to agree on a line on these weapons."

Dr. Meselson believes that tear gas and herbicides have some legitimate uses—tear gas in domestic crowd control, for instance—but he thinks that their use as an offensive military weapon should be curtailed.

For vacations, Dr. Meselson travels to the South Sea Islands and the Caribbean to skin dive and take underwater photographs. His office, off his laboratory, is filled with books about such places as Tahiti and Bora Bora.

His unflappable nature was exhibited in a restaurant in a restaurant here a few weeks ago. After he had had a hamburger lunch, the waitress asked him if his meal had been satisfactory.

"You might tell the chef," the biologist replied, quietly and without emotion, "that his meat is nearly ready to go bad."