

ARTICLES 25 JAN 71

Nazis No—Dissenters Yes

To the Editor:

The letter (Jan. 10) from L. M. Bernstein, titled "MacCarthyite Disruption of Scientific Meeting" (the A.A.A.S. Annual Meeting in Chicago), is but the latest example of a spate of writings that seek to tar present-day militant, or merely vocal, dissenters with the brush of Nazism. Typically, these writers describe some incident of heckling by a small, outraged antiwar group and then assert that it reminds them of Nazi youth in 1933 (or 1935 in Bernstein's case).

In 1933 Hitler was in power. The young Nazi militants were his supporters and their tactics were undoubtedly instigated by Hitler's own apparatus. It is absurd to compare these officially sponsored Nazi hoodlums with modern American dissenting groups that protest what is best described as a trend toward Nazism in our own country.

The fact is that our Bill of Rights, which is the chief documentary embodiment of American liberty, protects citizens from the abridgment of their rights by government authorities. It does not protect speakers from private hecklers. Ordinary laws, such as those prohibiting disorderly conduct, are perfectly adequate to deal with non-governmental hecklers here—as they were in Nazi Germany.

It is only when officials disrupt free speech — by sponsoring hecklers or provocateurs, by censorship or threat thereof, or by intimidation — that we have reason to fear incipient Nazism. Today, United States Government officials are routinely preventing free speech by such methods. This fact, not the actions of powerless hecklers, should alarm us all.

I write as a member of A.A.A.S. and a combat veteran of World War II.

CARL BARUS

Swarthmore, Pa., Jan. 10, 1971