

Totalitarian Tendencies

Scientist Looks at '1984'

By Charles Petit

It is just ten years until 1984. The retiring president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science took a long look yesterday at whether the totalitarianism forecast 25 years ago by author George Orwell will come to pass.

Leonard M. Rieser said he finds the book "more ominous today than I did on first reading."

In Orwell's "1984," the mind-deadening technology of the ruling class is used to enforce perversions of the normal meaning of words through processes called "Doublethink" and "Newspeak."

Such a tendency is seen today in some agencies of the U.S. government, said Rieser, who is dean of the faculty at Dartmouth College and a physics professor.

One example, he said, is a directive issued by the government last year to expunge the word "poverty" from the official vocabulary and replace it with "low income."

Others, he added, are "the attempt to rewrite history by denying bombing raids or



LEONARD M. RIESER
"More ominous today"

distorting file copies of cables, the tapping of telephone lines and the recording of conversations which have become cause celebre."

"One thing is certain," he said. "George Orwell would not consider our 1974 to be his 1984. We're not there yet, but there are signs in our own country that should be cause for serious alarm."

In his address to the science association, Rieser said, "In short, the finiteness of our planet could

move us toward the dismal society if national leaders continue to address the issues of mankind through phases and processes frighteningly close to newspeak and doublethink.

"We have not seen the light at the end of the Orwellian tunnel and there is still a danger that before 1984 we shall enter a tunnel at the end of the light."

In dealing with problems, he said — without mentioning names — "we cannot address crises using complex and obfuscating language in declarations that are later 'rendered inoperative.'"

Concerning ways to avoid a nightmare society, he advocated nothing revolutionary:

"Critical choices in our complex system require technical study and planning, accompanied by debate and political action."

He addressed an issue that has been a sore spot among scientists for several years — the apparent decline in influence of scientists on both Congress and the executive branch.

One bright spot, he said, is the recent creation of a U.S. Office of Technology Assess-

ment, which has selected as priority areas food, health, transportation, energy, and pollution.

Large scientific societies can be more effective in sharing their conclusions with the public, declared Rieser. He said that science will continue to search for life on other planets and concluded:

"But it will be 1984 in a very short time. If by then we achieve a world society that is the antithesis of the one Orwell described, it will be because we conducted our scientific and political affairs with the recognition that there is intelligent life on earth."