To the Editor:

The AHA, I had always thought, was supposed to be apolitical. I was therefore dismayed to see that last December the business meeting adopted, and the Council approved, a resolution favoring a nuclear weapons freeze. Some people might argue, of course, that this issue is so clearcut that it is not actually "political," that it is in fact really moral or perhaps even scholarly in nature, and that the AHA thus has a right to take a stand on the matter. I would like therefore to explain why I think such views are mistaken, and thus why I feel that at the very least the Council should withdraw its support for this resolution and refer it to the membership for a vote.

The first clause asserts that we "as professional historians" warn the public that "all large scale accumulations of weapons by rival powers have *invariably* led to the worsening of their relations, and usually to war" (emphasis added). This assertion, however, is palpably false. To take but the most glaring counterexample: the period from the early 1950s to the early 1970s was marked by the greatest accumulation of destructive power by rival states that the world has ever seen,

but relations between America and Russia were clearly better at the end of the period during the years of detente than they were at the height of the Cold War two decades earlier. So we as a professional association are not merely on record as endorsing a particular interpretation of history, but we have endorsed one that is simply wrong. This in itself should be enough to give us pause.

But even putting points like this aside, and assuming a certain correlation between weapons accumulation and political tension, one cannot infer from this that the first causes the second. Those who argue along such lines make the classic error of confusing symptom with cause. The manner in which purely military rivalries affect political relations between states is an empirical question, and not a simple one at that. In some cases, for example, a failure to rearm can be destabilizing. My point is merely that this is not the kind of question which can be decided by a vote of historians, most of whom are not specialists in this field and thus cannot have studied this issue in any depth.

It follows I think that the resolution is essentially a political document. If there is any doubt about this, the operative part of the resolution (about which few on the Council apparently had misgivings) should clear it up. This part called first for negotiated arms reductions, and then for a unilateral American freeze on new nuclear weapons systems. If this call for a *unilateral* freeze is not "political," then I simply do not know what the term means.

I personally dislike having other people's politics forced down my throat, and I especially resent the attempt of a political faction—albeit one currently enjoying broad support—to have its views receive the official endorsement of the association as a whole. Even if such views reflected a scholarly consensus, which of course they do not, it would still be inappropriate for the AHA to endorse them officially. Historians as private citizens can support whatever policies they like, but the AHA as a professional association has no business in getting involved with these kinds of issues. I hope therefore that other members will join me in urging the Council to reverse its vote of last December and, if constitutionally it has no greater choice, at least submit resolutions of this sort to a vote of the membership as a whole. A failure to do so, it seems to me, can have but one interpretation. It would mean that the Council is acquiescing in the politicization of the AHA—and indeed, ultimately, in the driving out of those members who cannot stomach the political orientation that is adopted. If that is what the members of the Council want, let them at least say so; but if not—that is, if they have any real interest in maintaining the AHA as a body that can represent the profession as a whole—then I would like to see how their support for this resolution can possibly be defended.

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