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## A Plank for Science

The main functions of the national conventions of the major political parties are to nominate candidates for the presidency and the vice-presidency and to adopt a platform. We shall here confine our attention to the platforms, which are traditionally statements of party principles and policies. Platforms follow classical lines: the party in power pledges to continue and expand the programs successfully launched under its guidance, excoriates the opposition, praises its own administration, takes credit for the favorable events that occurred during its tenure of office, minimizes setbacks, and paints a grim picture of the evils that would befall the nation should the voters make the mistake of turning control of the government over to the other party. The opposition pledges itself to introduce new legislation to remedy the mistakes of the party in power, to infuse new energy into programs begun under its aegis but allowed to languish during the current administration, excoriates the incumbents, maximizes their reversals, minimizes their accomplishments, and promises to restore the republic to the happy state it enjoyed before it was brought to the brink of ruin by maladministration.

Platforms have been variously described as "something to run on but not to stand on," as "masterpieces of ambiguity," and as documents "full of sound and fury, signifying everything." But they are more than this. Their form is dictated by their function. They are designed to weld the party into unity, and hence must represent the least common denominator of party opinion. They commonly incorporate the major advances made by either party in the past and thus reflect changing concepts of government. A platform is no blueprint for specific action. It is rather an expression of general intent, and as such has something of the force of a moral commitment.

Platforms inevitably reflect current preoccupations of the nation: for some years there have been planks about labor, agriculture, health, foreign policy, domestic affairs, and so on in the platforms of both parties. This year, both Republicans and Democrats have included planks about science. Both parties favor accelerated space research and the international control of space and pursuit of research in atomic energy and medicine. They differ in the amount of detail they devote to basic research and to the role of the government in science. The Democrats "recognize the special role of the Federal Government in the support of basic and applied research" and stress especially an intensified program of reactor research for nuclear power. The Republicans are more specific about basic research: they recognize that "our continuing and great national need is for basic research"; they call for the federal government to support the basic research that industry cannot be expected to pursue. They advocate allowance of reasonable charges for overhead on research contracts, a matter that is not touched upon in the Democratic platform. The Democrats are also silent about the organization of the government for scientific administration and advice, but the Republicans advocate continuation of the President's Scientific Advisory Committee and of the Federal Council for Science and Technology. The Democrats plump for an expanded program in oceanography, a field not mentioned by the Republicans.

That the parties differ in detail is of less significance than that they agree on one major point: for the first time in history both have made the support and organization of science a major plank in their platforms.—G.DuS.