

involved the theft of photographic equipment with a reported value of about \$6000. A staff photographer found that some of it was being "peddled" in the Roxbury area. The other act involved physical damage to the IBM 1130 which was repaired at a cost greater than \$2500.

Theft is theft; vandalism is vandalism; the dropping and smearing of feces can be interpreted by the reader. In a period such as this, when strikes and occupations cannot be considered to be settled once and for all, it is particularly important that there be no concealment or playing down of the realities of the situation. Otherwise, the attitudes and behaviors of administrations and faculties will be incomprehensible to the outside world.

JOHN W. SENDERS  
*Department of Psychology,  
Brandeis University,  
Waltham, Massachusetts 02154*

### Exasperation in the Lab

How often has a research project been delayed or disrupted by the failure of a supplier to deliver an item within the time promised? If our experience is typical, these delays have become common in university research. When an order is placed with a company for multiple items, and it is filled on time, one or more items are usually back-ordered. Some suppliers even advertise materials which they cannot furnish at all. These practices are becoming universal—and the delays are not nominal—they are substantial, as long as a year in some cases.

Here, we attempt to circumvent these delays on low-cost items by ordering them from those companies which we have learned will give good service. But our larger purchase orders are sent out for bids. It is almost impossible to convince a purchasing agent that the next-to-lowest bid is preferable to the lowest bid because we know from experience that the lowest bid will not be delivered on time. He will say, "How do you know? What will I tell the auditor? I can't tell him that you *think* a graduate student will waste  $x$  amount of time waiting for the equipment or supplies to arrive."

I suggest that manufacturers of scientific equipment and supplies should have a code of ethics. When a company lists a "stock item" in its catalog, it should be a stock item in their stocks.

When a company promises delivery within a certain time period, delivery should be assured. Late delivery should be the exception rather than the rule.

PAUL A. HARTMAN  
*Department of Bacteriology,  
Iowa State University, Ames 50010*

### Involuntary Birth Control

Ketchel's suggestion (Letters, 11 Apr.) that science should develop methods of involuntary birth control, in readiness for the day when mass starvation is the only alternative, is superficially persuasive. The argument bears an uncanny resemblance to those for advance production of weaponry. It ignores the question of who in "society" or which society will make the decision he so blithely allocates to society at large. Much will depend on who has starved already and who might be reduced in numbers to prevent the starvation of particular others. Alas, his suggestion even ignores the bitter and unscientific fact that technology is too often the mother of ideology. One cannot so easily allow "society" to make the ultimate decisions in use of techniques. On the contrary, there is much to be said for the vigorous expression of professional ethical principles by the creators of those techniques.

E. A. HAMMEL  
*Department of Anthropology,  
University of California, Berkeley*

### Federal Information Policies

The Committee on Scientific and Technical Information of the Federal Council on Science and Technology has established a task force to review the government's technical information dissemination policies, assess their adequacy, and recommend improvements. The task force has already interviewed many federal officials, but it would also appreciate hearing from other scientists and engineers. What obstacles do they encounter in obtaining access to the government's scientific and technical information? Are the results of the government's R & D programs actually available to and utilized by the private sector? What improvements are needed and what recommendations should be made? What specific aspects of government dissemination programs or systems do they find satisfactory, commendable,

or would like to see expanded? These are a few of the questions asked by the task force.

In stating your personal views, please identify yourself as scientist, engineer, librarian, information specialist, manager, or other (specify). Anonymous comments cannot be considered. However, the identity of the contributors will not be disclosed without their permission. If you wish to obtain a brief summary of the responses, please mention this. All replies should be sent to me.

CURRIE S. DOWNIE  
*Task Group on Dissemination of  
Information, Office of Aerospace  
Research, 1400 Wilson Boulevard,  
Arlington, Virginia 22209*

### Alcoholic Decisions Are Old Stuff

The findings of Goodwin *et al.* ("Alcohol and recall: State-dependent effects in man," 21 Mar., p. 1358), reported on memory tasks performed while sober or under the influence of alcohol. Their findings reminded us of an earlier report (ca. 450 B.C.) concerning the Persians (1). Among his remarks regarding Persian customs, Herodotus states:

It is also their general practice to deliberate upon affairs of weight when they are drunk; and then on the morrow, when they are sober, the decision to which they came the night before is put before them by the master of the house in which it was made; and if it is then approved of, they act on it; if not, they set it aside. Sometimes, however, they are sober at their first deliberation, but in this case they always reconsider the matter under the influence of wine.

The author does not present the data necessary for a statistical evaluation of the quality of decisions made under these circumstances, but the (sober-sober?) Greeks eventually conquered the Persians. Alcohol seems to influence the quality of decisions as well as the quality of recall. There is, after all, nothing new under the sun, so Goodwin *et al.* should be aware of those who preceded them in discussing these fascinating phenomena.

BERNARD CAFFREY  
DOROTHY CLEMMER  
*Department of Epidemiology, Tulane  
University, New Orleans, Louisiana*

#### Reference

1. Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus*, G. Rawlinson, Transl. (Tudor, New York, 1944), p. 52.