court ruling, the Department of Agriculture refuses to grant access to the back-up files on which each letter of warning is based.

Another consultant to the Nader center, Peter H. Schuck, considers the Freedom of Information Act to be almost impossible to enforce because it creates no incentives for officials to comply promptly with a request for information. "The pervasive attitude in government is 'If you don't like it, sue us,'" Schuck says. He and Welford believe that the law should provide penalties for officials who are found to have withheld information unjustifiably.

Despite the act's many deficiencies in practice, there seems to be agreement that it is worth having. The Nader center, for example, is consider-

Public-Interest Advocates Examine Role of Scientists

More than half a dozen organizations representing various flowerings of the non-Establishment science movement took part in a conference last week on "science in the public interest," arranged by the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), a small, nonprofit Washington research group (*Science*, 9 July 1971).

The conference was open to anyone who cared to attend. Present were 100 or so scientists, students, bureaucrats, consumer advocate types, and at least one curious businessman.

Discussions encompassed two complementary themes: the need for the public to stand up and demand that science and technology respond to social needs, and the need for scientists to broaden their concepts of their roles and public responsibilities. In fact, one thing that emerged from the talk was that scientists may be ripe for their own "lib" movement. Scientists, like women (a comparison that was not made explicit, but that seemed apt to some viewers), have long been passive when it comes to asserting themselves outside their assigned roles, and have been to some extent oblivious of their real power. They have also confused allegiance to their employers with allegiance to their professions, thereby losing sight of the fact that the welfare of science and society go hand in hand.

James Turner, a former Ralph Nader lawyer who now works with Consumer Action for Improved Foods and Drugs, said that "the vindictiveness of the scientific establishment" forces scientists to be over-cautious in order to retain their jobs. He cited several instances, both in government and in industry, where scientists have been demoted, harrassed, or deprived of necessary resources when they took controversial positions or openly questioned employer policies and practices. Scientists need to know when and how to take legal action and how to negotiate with their employers for their rights, said Turner. He suggested an appropriate starting point might be the creation of an "ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] for science."

Alan Nixon, president-elect of the American Chemical Society, had similar opinions. The first loyalty of chemists—70 percent of whom work for industry—he said, has always been to their employers. But for a chemist to properly discharge his responsibility to society, he must have a "professional atmosphere where [he] will identify with his profession rather than his employer." He indicated that professional societies could contribute to this atmosphere by forcefully backing up members who got into disputes with their employers.

Jeremy Stone of the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) proposed another way in which large professional organizations could bolster the public-interest cause. Through a "passback" system of dues, a member, if he chose, could add a couple of dollars to his annual dues and designate the public-interest group he wanted the sum sent to. The society would forward the money, and the group would reimburse it for administrative costs, thus saving the expense of a direct-mail campaign.

The conference also dwelt on the difficulty citizens' groups have in gaining access to the scientific information required for carrying on battles against highways and environmental poisons. Former New York Representative Richard Ottinger said the group he heads, "Grassroots," spent a fruitless 2 years trying to locate a scientist who would testify that the proposed Storm King power plant on the Hudson River would (as research had indicated) endanger a bass spawning ground.

Said Michael Jacobson, a scientist and CSPI member, "it's as difficult as pulling a tiger's tooth to get a technical expert to speak out on a public matter."*

David Baltimore, a molecular biologist from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, warned that, if scientists continue to eschew taking independent and aggressive stands on social matters, the whole profession will suffer. "American science," starting with the moonshot program, he said, "is rapidly becoming a State Science." The result is that politicians are increasingly making the decisions on what fields are ripe for investigation and who should get the money. "Unless the scientific community reacts soon, it will be too late to salvage the freedom which has allowed scientists to make significant contributions to society."

Such a reaction may be difficult to mobilize. There were no yelps of denial from listeners when management consultant Carl Pacifico, the panel's token industrialist, proclaimed: "Most scientists choose their profession because they don't want to get involved in the real world. . . . Most of them are as unaware of what's going on as they ever were."

The conference ended with a passionate warning from Albert Fritsch, the scientist-priest in CSPI's quadrumvirate. Industry opposition to science in the public interest, he says, has gone through three stages—from indifference, to soothing advertising campaigns, to subtle hostility. Next, fears Fritsch, there will be "open opposition to public interest as a threat to the system."

—CONSTANCE HOLDEN

* To ameliorate this problem, CSPI is developing a computer service to match consumer groups seeking information with scientists possessing relevant expertise.