

# AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE

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## Science and Public Understanding

When tens of thousands of troubled Americans swarm into Washington on a magnificent May morning to register a civil protest against nuclear power technology, the First Amendment becomes a powerful factor influencing the future course of science and its applications. Choice is very much alive in the land. This is as it should be, and we can hope that it will not always take a Harrisburg scare to awaken public interest in science and its uses. But the right of choice is not sufficient, standing alone. The *quality* of the choice is at the heart of the matter, and a media event is not necessarily the best instrument for informing the act of choosing.

The risk is that public opinion may come to equate scientific progress and discovery with "ugly" technology and leave it at that. The matter arises not just from a sense of brooding uncertainty about nuclear power, but just as much from polarized debates about the strategic weapons balance, the rumor of dark doings involving the particle beam weapon, a credibility gap concerning petroleum shortages, alarms accompanied by reassurances regarding the impacts of carbon dioxide buildup in the atmosphere, and the increasing man-machine interface that goes along with advancing telecommunications sophistication. It is a difficult business to project, above this noise level, an awareness of man's leaping understanding of his universe—of its behavior, its resources, its possibilities, and its wonders. The joys of research and discovery, the glimpse of creativity, and the meanings of the quickening journey to knowledge take second place to the trumpeting of technological crisis, real or apparent.

For more than a decade, the constitution of the AAAS has mandated the responsibility "to increase public understanding and appreciation of the importance and promise of the methods of science in human progress." That is a large and perplexing assignment, and the AAAS to date has tried to meet it with the tools at its disposal: *Science*, the Annual Meeting, regional seminars on problems of science and society, Media Fellows and Congressional Fellows, and ad hoc projects. It has not been enough. The universe to be reached is large, and the exuberance of science and technology outpaces the effective reach of these limited initiatives. The time has come to do more.

At its spring meeting, the Board of Directors unanimously approved a major new effort by the AAAS to advance public understanding of science and technology. It takes the form of a new kind of magazine, to be called initially *Science 80*, for an educated public readership. Grounded on the reputation and credibility of AAAS, and with exacting standards of editorial responsibility, *Science 80* will cover important and exciting developments and discoveries in all the sciences as well as medicine and technology, and present them in clear and readable language. It will go beyond the reporting of science and technology to examine impacts on people, nations, and cultures. It will cover the controversies and public policies that involve science, and it will describe the process by which new science is created: how scientists work, and where they get their ideas. At the same time, it will be neither an imitation nor a substitute for *Science*, which has a very different role in reporting advances at the frontiers of science and in analyzing the trends and directions that affect the scientific enterprise.

This new venture would not be possible if the AAAS were not a nonprofit association with an implicit social responsibility, or if it were not fortified with the editorial and technical strengths to do the job well. The undertaking will not be easy, and there are risks that the AAAS understands and accepts. But the response to a large mail test has been very strong indeed, indicating that a magazine of this kind published by the AAAS will get a very good reception.

The first issue of *Science 80*, which will initially be issued bimonthly, is planned for the fall of 1979. We hope and believe that the members of the AAAS will have reason to be proud of it and view it as worthy company to *Science*, which remains the flagship of the AAAS as it approaches its 100th year of publication.—WILLIAM D. CAREY