

cycling some plastics. Separation of plastics for recycling could be made easier by reducing the number of plastics used in many products. Several kinds are used for such simple items as margarine tubs.

The underlying message of Flavin's report is that to make best use of our remaining oil and gas supplies, developed nations had better start getting their priorities in order. It is probable that "oil use [because of cutbacks in long-range production plans] will never rise much above the current level and could be well below it by 2000." Although "it is probably safe to predict that a barrel of oil will cost \$100 before the end of the decade," writes Flavin, "most societies use oil and gas quite indiscriminately . . . it is as if the world community were a family that kept the house warm by burning finished lumber in the fireplace."

Government incentives to encourage efficient use of oil and gas supplies are desirable, but "it would be hard to justify giving synthetic producers advantages over other oil users if large quantities of petrochemicals continue to be converted into plastic trash."

Feds Defend Bubble Meddle

Scientists have been disgruntled over awkward attempts by the departments of Commerce and State to prevent communists from gaining access to information at two conferences held recently in California (*Science*, 7 March). At one conference, on bubble memory technology, the government denied visas to several Russian and Eastern European scientists and induced Chinese scientists to sign "letters of assurance" that they wouldn't impart any information gained to citizens of 17 other communist nations. Visas were also denied Soviets who planned to attend a later meeting about laser fusion. The fuss stimulated an indignant flurry of letters from scientists to officials at State and Commerce.

On 25 April the AAAS committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility, headed by Harvard biologist John T. Edsall, invited State and Commerce officials to come over and explain their behavior (described by John L. Vossen, head of the American

Vacuum Society which sponsored the bubble memory meeting, as an "unprecedented, frivolous and foolish exercise of hamhanded bureaucratic power over a technical meeting").

A State Department representative explained that the visa denials were directly related to the government's effort to tighten up on scientific contacts following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the exile of Andrei Sakharov. He said the department had no problem with "bona fide" Russian scientists (that is, nonspies) coming to open scientific meetings, but it wanted to stop Russians coming in by the "back door" to high-technology conferences where they had easy access to the sort of information the Administration is trying to keep from them in government-to-government contacts.

This seemed pretty straightforward and members of the committee appeared to accept the policy so long as technical societies were not, as they were in the California meetings, put in the embarrassing position of having to do the disinviting after the State Department had, apparently mistakenly, already issued visas.

The committee had more difficulty swallowing the Commerce Department explanation of its application of the Export Control Act at the bubble memory meeting. This act gives the department authority to control the export of material and information (including that conveyed orally to a foreigner) if it is deemed threatening to national security. The act, which has been in force for 30 years, is commonly applied to corporate activity and in fact, as far as Kent Knowles from Commerce knew, this was the first time it had ever been invoked to apply to information conveyed at a scientific meeting. He said that the regulations applied because it was a case of "data not publicly available" relating to bubble technology applications being conveyed to foreigners. The scientists on the committee thought it was silly for anyone to regard the information being bandied about at the bubble meeting as being in any way sensitive or proprietary since, as they pointed out, there were representatives from about 24 competing firms there, none of whom would have divulged anything the rest didn't already know. After several rounds of good-natured and repetitious arguing, the

disagreement between Knowles and the committee remained intact.

Both visiting officials indicated that the probable upshot of the fuss will be attempts by the departments involved to clarify their positions and improve communications with the scientific community. Warned Edsall: "you may be doing more damage to the progress of technology in the U.S. by making things difficult for us than you are gaining by obstructing foreigners' access to meetings."

Time for *Discover*

After years of talking it over, Time Inc. decided on 17 April to go ahead with a new popular magazine about science. Called *Discover*, the first issue of the monthly will appear in late September. *Discover* will be competing directly with *Science 80*, the AAAS's entry into the fast-growing field of science publications, which made its debut last November.

According to its editor, Leon Jaroff, *Discover* will have a "slightly different tone" from *Science 80* and will be "more like a *Time* magazine of the sciences"—that is, more newsy and with shorter articles. It will have a number of *Time*-like features, including one on "science people" and reviews of books, movies, and television shows that have a "science or pseudo-science theme." It will be on the lookout to nail "distorted impressions of science," says Jaroff. "If a David Rorvik book [an allegedly factual book about human cloning] comes along we'll tear it apart mercilessly."

Discover aims to reach an initial circulation of 400,000 (*Science 80*'s current circulation) and although Jaroff will not speculate on the ultimate market, "a meaningful figure to Time Inc. would be greater than 1 million." Start-up costs, according to a Time executive, are to be "in the double-digit millions." (*Science 80* started with \$1.2 million.)

Jaroff says that to start the magazine now, with the economy in the shape it is in, "took a lot of guts." But he is convinced that the audience is there. He notes that issues of *Time* whose covers dealt with science have consistently had the highest sales, topped only by those featuring drugs, sex, and rock stars.

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