Letters

"Disloyalty" and DOD Funding

In his confirmation hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Donald A. Hicks, the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering, seemed to be proposing an oath of loyalty to Department of Defense policies for scientists seeking support for their research:

> I am not particularly interested in seeing department money going to someplace where an individual is outspoken in his rejection of department aims, even for basic research.

He has elaborated on this view in an interview with *Science* (News & Comment, 25 Apr., p. 444). At the very least, he advocates a code of silence:

> All the internal memos in the world are terrific, but when a guy stands up and gives an interview and goes on television, somehow he's not one of us.

I read these remarks with dismay. Their effect is chilling. Perhaps their starkness would be softened if they appeared in the context of the full interview, to which I do not have access, but nonetheless Hicks has raised very disturbing issues.

Federal support of basic research in the United States has been justified on the grounds that a strong scientific and technical community is a national resource, vital to our national security and our economic strength in the modern world. Many of us would add that it is also essential to the quality of our culture of which we are so proud. Surely the best—indeed the only—way to nurture and sustain a community of the best scientists and engineers is to support the best work. Are we now to understand that political loyalty to DOD programs will also be a standard for deciding who and what to support?

Public debate on major policy issues is a principle and a strength of this nation; it sets us apart from those against whom we seek to protect ourselves. Muting it or confining it to private memos may make the life of government officials easier, but will it lead to more enlightened national policy? Opponents of Stars Wars, in particular, are singled out for criticism by Hicks. Many critics of the Reagan Administration's Strategic Defense Initiative program are, however, no less dedicated than Hicks to the national security, which they take to include our full range of military needs, a sound budgetary policy, and our treaty obligations. Will the nation be stronger if these scientists are lost to research or silenced in the public debate of this important issue?

I hope that Hicks will respond and dispel the concerns raised by his published interview. They touch fundamental values of our society. On a practical level, their importance can be measured by the fact that, in this year's budget, the DOD is the source of three-fourths of all federally supported R&D.

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I am shocked by the statements made by Under Secretary of Defense Hicks regarding the policy of possibly refusing Department of Defense funding for researchers who criticize DOD policies. He says that he "has a tough time with disloyalty." Does this mean that he is collecting a "blacklist" of people he considers disloyal? If so, what are his criteria for disloyalty? If so, who does he think he is, a commissar of correct attitudes? If so, does he wish or not wish to live in a democratic country, within its political processes? If so, he should be given an elementary civics course, apologize to those of us who dare to criticize DOD and Administration policies, and indeed be asked to resign for his un-American policy.

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Partly as a result of an article in your magazine, some questions have arisen regarding my views on the award of grants for basic research. In view of the broadened interest in this issue, let me make my views quite clear.

The support of basic research is one of the ways the Department of Defense uses resources to accomplish its mission. In our support of this research, we try to identify the best talent with the best ideas. We also try to foster an environment that encourages controversy and diverse viewpoints. Intellectual ferment breeds scientific and technical progress. We do not apply political "litmus tests" to individuals or institutions.

Having said that, I should add that I am not enthusiastic about the idea of using defense resources to subsidize the work of people who are outspoken critics of our national defense goals or policies. That is a personal view. The criteria which govern the award of grants have been, and continue to be, as stated in the preceding paragraph.

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"Tradition" Questioned

I was in the midst of writing a research renewal proposal for the National Science Foundation today when I read John Walsh's doubly discouraging article (News & Comment, 25 Apr., p. 440). Not only is NSF funding likely to be reduced, but academicians are hoping to retain "traditional one-*man*, one-grant" research.

My question is, should I keep on writing?

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The SSC and a Balanced Budget

Barbara J. Culliton and Colin Norman report an ambivalent stance on the part of the Association of American Universities (AAU) toward the budgets for "science" (News & Comment, 9 May, pp. 704 and 705). On the one hand the AAU says that in the budget reduction policies many factors "converge to work against the institutions of higher learning." On the other hand it endorses the building and operation of the Superconducting Super Collider (SSC), with a $6-billion construction estimate.

I wonder if this is the best the academic science community—represented by its most prestigious subset—can do in playing its role as an institutional citizen of the United States in 1986? What is the responsibility of the engineering and science community and of the major research universities in solving the deficit, the debt service, and the foreign trade imbalance? Don't scientists keep in mind those exploding exponential curves of the deficit when they make policy statements?

Look at the arithmetic. Let us say the annual debt service on $6 billion for the SSC will be $0.6 billion. Typically such "big science" items will require, say, 20 to 25% of the construction cost for annual operating costs. Together then the AAU is advocating the expenditure in perpetuity of some $1.5 billion to $2 billion per year. Yet it is complaining about the reduction in overhead ($100 million to $300 million) and loss of scholarships. Scientists from other fields—chemists trying to get the Pimentel report implemented, molecular biologists helping to build new industries, materials scientists struggling to retain old ones—seem mesmerized by this sleight of hand. The same old misleading chestnuts are dragged out. "Beyond the loss of potential technological benefits . . ." reads the rheto-

ric defending the SSC. If the AAU has drawn up such a list and compared it to the benefits of committing the same $1 billion per year to, say, 100 new university-government-industry centers, paying full overhead, revitalizing science education from first grade to graduate school, and so forth, it has surely kept it secret. If not, such rhetorical claims mislead both the public and the engineering and science community on the most important policy issue of our time—"science *or* engineering." The Department of Defense recently received some 900 proposals for a total of $7 billion in its University Research Initiative program. And by some unbelievable value structure, only $75 million is allocated to this program by the same nation that wants to put $1 billion into the SSC. Most incredible of all, the victims of this discrimination have not learned that they can stop it with a few hundred well-placed letters to Congress. An AAU spokesperson also is quoted indirectly as saying that the "nation will need more, not fewer, Ph.D.'s." Agreed. How will the SSC contribute to this need? By sidetracking even more Ph.D.'s into the societally irrelevant SSC. Are scientists not citizens, and have they no responsibility to help reduce the budget deficit in their own area? A minimal contribution must surely be to shelve the SSC until appropriate international arrangements can be made to advance the field collectively. Without such a policy posture, which I believe has the support not only of the vast majority of most other scientists but of the physics community itself (*1*), no American scientist can complain about any cuts in any of our programs which save less than the SSC cost.

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REFERENCES

1. Letters, *Phys. Today* **39**, 11 (April 1986).

Erratum: In the article "Bloch prepares NSF for lean years" by John Walsh (News & Comment, 25 Apr., p. 440), the labels for "Coordinated research" and "Large projects" were inadvertently reversed in a chart depicting the breakdown of the fiscal year 1986 National Science Foundation budget. Coordinated research accounts for 14% of total research, and large projects account for 20%. A corrected chart is shown below.