

Growth of Information Management by Government Pilloried in Report

The Reagan Administration's adoption of a "panoramic definition" of national security has led to a steady expansion of government controls on scientific information and communication. That assertion is the take-off point for a new policy paper* that offers a conclusion that "Important values of free speech, academic inquiry and democratic participation have all been adversely affected by the recent trends in federal information policy."

The Association of American Universities (AAU), the chief national organization of research universities, commissioned the paper to stimulate discussion as the AAU shapes a set of recommendations on scientific information and other issues to present to the next President-elect. The authors are John Shattuck, Harvard vice president for government, community, and public affairs, and Muriel Morisey Spence, a policy analyst in that office.

Arguing that the concept of national security in the Reagan era has "undergone an apparently unlimited expansion," the report provides a "catalogue of forms in which restrictions can be packaged." The catalogue is extensive.

One focus of the report is the extension of the Export Administration Act to scientific communication. The authors note that the law was originally enacted to regulate the export of goods and machinery, but has been expanded to restrict the communication of technical information and ideas within the United States. Probably the best known effect has been to limit the access of foreigners to scientific meetings here and to place controls on the papers to be presented. Provisions aimed at assuring that technical data regarded as sensitive will not be available to foreigners impinges on other university activities. Attendance at classes, use of libraries, visits to laboratories, and, particularly, use of supercomputers by foreigners are all affected.

Universities have been reluctant to be responsible for enforcing export control laws. Negotiations over guidelines for use of supercomputers, for example, have dragged on for more than 2 years.

The survey notes that the Administration has expanded the security classification system dating from World War II, particularly in the legal realm of "prior restraint." Government officials have shown a growing

inclination to classify results during the course of a project rather than at the start as has been the practice, for example, creating a category of "potentially classifiable" work.

Also noted, is the ordering of blanket nondisclosure agreements that impose an open-ended requirement for official clearance to allow government employees to write about matters they dealt with while in federal service. It is suggested that the rule could cover consultants as well. And, while previous federal classification authority was limited to government sponsored research, a new executive order leaves to agency discretion attempts to classify privately sponsored work.

Casting the classification net even wider is the theory of the "information mosaic." According to the report, the idea is that "bits and pieces of seemingly harmless data . . . can be assembled through sophisticated search techniques in such a way as to be harmful in the aggregate." Reference to the mosaic theory popped up recently in reports of what appeared to be a case of attempted computer espionage. A West German "intruder" is said to have systematically sought entrance to some 450 computers belonging to the U.S. military and military contractors.

The paper also discusses information

management carried out in the name of reducing government spending and excessive government regulation. The report points to what it sees as manipulation of the Paperwork Reduction Act, in particular to the actions of the Office of Management and Budget in passing judgment on agency plans to gather information.

The report is more than a think piece since it prescribes a series of revisions of the existing system of controls including a remedial Executive Order on Information Policy. The report does not represent the formal views of the AAU, but the organization's president Robert M. Rosenzweig, says he anticipates that the AAU's recommendations on information policy to the new president will resemble those in the report.

The tensions will not be easily resolved. The report persuasively illustrates that this administration has moved farther and faster than its predecessors in enlarging the boundaries of national security protections, but the trends toward sharper concern about technology transfer were established no later than the 1970s—the export control act was a product of the Carter Administration.

Implementation of tighter controls has been contested by Congress as well as the universities and the Administration has not always had its way. No single formula is likely to assure a balance between national security and academic independence and the negotiations are sure to continue. ■

JOHN WALSH

South Africa Blocks AAAS Visit

Without explanation, South Africa denied travel visas to members of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and three other U.S. scientific organizations on 5 April. The seven-member group was planning to depart that day for a 2-week visit to universities and clinics in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban.

Their purpose was to inquire about medical care for detainees and to follow up on an earlier report—*Turning A Blind Eye?*, sponsored by the Ford Foundation and published in 1987 by the AAAS's Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility. The report describes the death during detention of political leader Steven Biko and gives evidence of the mistreatment of other prisoners. It found that the nation's medical establishment did not adequately uphold the most fundamental precept of medical ethics—*primum non nocere* (above all, do no harm).

Elena O. Nightingale of the Carnegie

Corporation in New York, heads the 1988 delegation. In addition to the AAAS delegates, it includes representatives from the American Psychiatric Association, the American Public Health Association, and the Institute of Medicine.

Nightingale was "disappointed" with the last-minute rejection but says, "We hope very much to go to South Africa to carry out the mission at a future time." Kari Hannibal of the AAAS staff says that it may be possible to resubmit the applications in time for an autumn visit. South African officials gave no reasons for blocking the visas, and Hannibal has no idea whether their objections arose from the timing of the trip, the identity of the groups to be visited, or some other cause. But she notes that several of the groups to be visited, including the non-establishment National Medical and Dental Association, were among those recently banned from having public meetings. ■

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*"Government Information Controls: Implications for Scholarship, Science and Technology."