

SCIENCE

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LETTERS

Speaking Out

I was astonished to see in the 22 March 1993 issue of *The Scientist* an article reporting on events at the Boston AAAS meeting (1), where *Science* reporter Christopher Anderson was said to have announced the existence of a “blacklist” of scientists—including Edward O. Wilson, Bruce Ames, and me—engaged in “advocacy.” Anderson is quoted as saying that I left the realm of credibility when I began writing and talking about nuclear winter. Please help me to understand: The first scientific report on nuclear winter was published after extensive peer review in *Science* (2). An update was published 7 years later in *Science* (3), also after peer review.

Suppose you had found that the global consequences of nuclear war were much worse than had been generally understood and that military establishments worldwide had overlooked those consequences, especially in a time of a swiftly proliferating strategic arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union and when allegedly responsible officials were talking about nuclear war being “survivable” and “winnable.” Wouldn’t you be concerned? Would you think it your responsibility to keep quiet about this because the results were not absolutely certain, or because the full-scale experimental verification had not yet been obtained?

Or would you consider it your obligation to your children and the children of everyone else to speak up? Keeping quiet under such circumstances seems bizarre and reprehensible to me.

Because our technology has achieved formidable powers, and because we sometimes can be careless in its application, this issue is of broad importance. If scientists will not speak out when they see such a danger to the human species, who will? And how can it possibly be in the interest of science or the public to “blacklist” scientists who advocate policy emanating from peer-reviewed scientific research?

Carl Sagan

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References

1. S. Veggeberg, *Scientist* 7, 1 (22 March 1992).
2. R. P. Turco, O. B. Toon, T. P. Ackerman, J. B. Pollack, C. Sagan, *Science* 222, 1283 (1983).
3. ———, *ibid.* 247, 166 (1990).

Like Sagan, I was puzzled at being “black-listed” by Christopher Anderson at the AAAS meeting for having addressed the larger public on an environmental problem and advocated action to solve it. In presenting estimates of species extinction rates in my recent book, *The Diversity of Life* (Harvard University Press, 1992), I asked a wide range of other scientists—including all those I thought might be most skeptical—to examine the evidence presented. In the end I felt I had arrived at something close to a consensus. The problem is real, and calls for advocacy.

It is reasonable then to ask what scientists are expected to do when they hit upon a serious environmental problem. Whisper in the ear of a journalist? Entirely and chastely refrain from publishing outside technical journals, hoping the results will be discovered by nonscientists? *Science* does an outstanding job of reporting public issues, but it would be hobbled if it relied on scientists immune to Anderson’s blacklist.

Edward O. Wilson

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Response: Christopher Anderson has written a letter to the editor of *The Scientist* (17 May 1993, p. 12) correcting misquotations and misrepresentations in *The Scientist’s* article. Anderson was expressing his personal views at the meeting, not those of *Science’s* editors. The use of the term “blacklist,” which he regrets, was meant to be facetious. The thrust of his remarks was that even great scientists sometimes have to be assessed with a grain of salt when they become advocates.

Let me state *Science’s* policy on covering scientist-advocates. We encourage our reporters to cover contentious issues of science and particularly to seek out protagonists who are scientists and who care about the policy implications of their research. Under no circumstances would we have a policy of failing to seek out the leaders in an area just because they are advocates, but we owe it to our readers to check their extrapolations or to interview proponents of alternative points of view when we believe it desirable to present a balanced view of a controversial subject.

—**Daniel E. Koshland, Jr.**