

FUSION RESEARCH

Johnston Takes Project Hostage

Hostage-taking can be a chancy tactic, because your adversary may turn on his heel and walk away from the ransom demand. Yet one astute deal-maker in Congress—Senator Bennett Johnston (D-LA), chair of the energy appropriations subcommittee—has in effect taken hostage a major fusion energy project, demanding that the Administration give more long-term support to the field. Johnston has gotten attention by means of this risky maneuver, although at this writing, the ransom has not been delivered, and the hostage is still being held captive.

Johnston's hostage goes by the name of the Tokamak Physics Experiment (TPX), a proposed \$700-million test in which superconducting magnets would confine a plasma for periods of as long as 15 minutes, providing the first test of steady-state fusion power. Construction was due to begin at the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory (PPPL) in 1995; the president's budget called for spending \$67 million to get it started this fall. But last week Johnston persuaded a House-Senate legislative conference to endorse the deci-

sion originally taken by his energy appropriation subcommittee: eliminating construction funds for TPX. It also cut TPX funding overall, giving the Department of Energy (DOE) only \$42 million for "engineering design and research and development."

Johnston doesn't mean to kill the project. He is a supporter of fusion who warned in February that he could not vote for "new mortgages" on projects like TPX without a long-term commitment from the Administration to fund fusion. "We do not want another SSC where we get \$1 billion into a project and then find, 'Oh we didn't realize' it would cost \$10 billion," Johnston said to DOE Secretary Hazel O'Leary. Johnston sees the same danger for TPX's successor, a prototype fusion reactor called the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER). Estimated at \$8 billion to \$10 billion, ITER is planned as a joint project by the United States, Japan, Russia, and Europe.

As a result, Johnston told O'Leary: "I will be strongly opposed" to beginning TPX "unless and until the Administration commits

itself to go forward with ITER." What the senator wants, says Stephen Dean, director of the lobbying group Fusion Energy Associates, is an authorizing bill, endorsed by Congress and the president, approving construction of both TPX and ITER. No such bill has passed as yet, although the House Science Committee has cleared one that authorizes construction of TPX and engineering work on ITER; if it passes Congress later this year, some fusion advocates hold out hope that Johnston would back a "supplemental appropriation" to start construction of TPX.

Meanwhile, Johnston's maneuver has brought mixed tidings for Princeton. "I am disappointed that it's not \$67 million" for TPX, says PPPL director Ron Davidson, but he's pleased that the conferees made up for the loss by giving fusion an 8% rise in 1995, the same amount proposed by the Administration. The bill includes \$15 million for the Princeton lab that will allow it to continue a successful string of experiments at an older machine—the Tokamak Fusion Test Reactor. By keeping this project going and delaying the new one, Congress will increase the cost of both—showing that hostage-taking may not only be risky, but also expensive.

—Eliot Marshall

DEFENSE FUNDING

Recruiting Ban Affects Research Grants

Protests against military recruitment on college campuses may seem like a relic of the Vietnam era. But the issue of whether the military should be allowed to recruit on campus is still very much alive for one group of scientists: researchers at the State University of New York (SUNY) system. These researchers are innocent bystanders caught up in a dispute over military recruitment and gays in the military, and they could pay a high price: millions of dollars in grants. Like the Vietnam War itself, this conflict shows signs of turning into a wider, more protracted—and senseless—struggle.

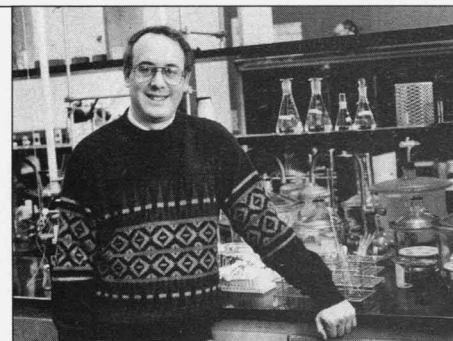
In a way, the conflict does date back to the Vietnam era, as its root is a 1973 law preventing the Department of Defense (DOD) from providing research funding to any university that bars military recruiters. Last November, the New York State Supreme Court ruled in favor of a former SUNY-Buffalo law student who said she was barred from military employment because she is a lesbian. The court decided that allowing military recruiters on the Buffalo campus violated a 1988 order from Governor Mario Cuomo preventing state agencies from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation; it told SUNY not to provide services "to any employer that discriminates on the basis of sexual orientation." The university system decided not to appeal, and then-Chancellor

D. Bruce Johnstone directed officials at SUNY's 29 campuses to "prohibit use of their facilities for military recruitment."

The Army decided that under the 1973 law it could not fund some research projects at the affected campuses. The threat is most immediate for three scientists (two at SUNY-Stony Brook and one at SUNY-Buffalo) who have been told by the U.S. Army Medical Research, Development, Acquisition, and Logistics Command that their grants, totaling \$2.45 million, will be canceled by the end of the month unless SUNY changes its position. University and military officials say 42 defense-sponsored research projects at Buffalo alone set to start this fall are also in jeopardy.

"This is one of the most frustrating experiences of my life," says biochemist David Lawrence, principal investigator on a pending 3-year, \$800,000 Army grant to SUNY-Buffalo for work on developing inhibitors of tyrosine kinase, an enzyme involved in the growth of breast tumors. "It's disturbing that grants may be funded depending on whether or not a university is politically correct," he says. "My feeling is that I'd be foolish to stay at SUNY if that were the case."

The fate of the grants rests with Army Secretary Togo West, who has the authority under the 1973 law to fund the grants if he deems them "of vital importance to the security of the United States." A decision from



Frustrated. Biochemist David Lawrence may lose his \$800,000 research grant.

the secretary's office is due later this month.

Other researchers could be affected if this dirty little war spreads. In May Representative Gerald Solomon (R-NY) won passage of an amendment to the annual reauthorization of military programs requiring DOD to withhold funds for grants or contracts to any university that prevents recruiting. Last month, the Senate passed a defense-authorization amendment from Senator Don Nickles (R-OK) similar to Solomon's legislation, which Nickles estimates would affect more than 100 universities and colleges around the country that restrict military recruiters. The Solomon-Nickles legislation is expected to be retained in the defense bill presented to President Clinton later this year—and so it looks like the Vietnam conflict could return to more research campuses this fall.

—Richard Stone