

Letters

ORSA and the ABM

In Nicholas Wade's account, "ABM debate: Learned society split by old grievance," (15 Oct. 1971, p. 276) of a report published by a committee of the Operations Research Society of America (ORSA), the emphasis is entirely on the elements of conflict that engendered and accompanied the preparation of this report, and not all on its very real achievement. In fact, one would hardly realize from reading Wade's account that the ORSA committee has taken the occasion of a dispute arising out of conflicting testimony by operations research analysts on the antiballistic missile system (ABM) to produce, as the main body of its report, an impressively balanced, conscientious, and responsible set of guidelines for the professional practice of operations research.

These guidelines confront head-on the difficult problem of the proper role of the operations analyst in an adversary process of the sort that arose in the ABM testimony. They will unquestionably prove of great value to the practicing operations analyst, who is increasingly called upon these days not only to perform analyses that illuminate major decision problems of business, industry, and government, but also to present the results of such analyses in debate within government agencies or in such formal adversary proceedings as a court case or a congressional committee hearing.

Wade comments that the committee's report did not pass through the customary refereeing process before its publication as a special September 1971 issue of ORSA's official journal *Operations Research*. It would be my guess that this report, which the committee and the ORSA council clearly realized would have controversial aspects, was subjected to a much more careful professional scrutiny than would be usual for a scientific journal article. In publishing these guidelines, along with a detailed appendix analyzing how

they should have been applied in the instance of the 1969 ABM debate, ORSA has performed a valuable service to its profession. It took courage to do it.

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I found the report of the ORSA Ad Hoc Committee on Professional Standards to be objective and evenhanded; other professional societies would do well to emulate it. Wade's charge of one-sidedness does not seem valid to me. It is clear that much "expert" testimony before the Armed Services Committee on the ABM was not very expert. Philip Morse's threat to resign notwithstanding, the report made me proud to be a member of ORSA.

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I deplore the accusatory overtones in Wade's report on ORSA and the ABM controversy. Certainly the ORSA report is controversial and unprecedented. Wade would have us believe that operations research analysts as a group are a bunch of milquetoasts so beholden to their financial sources as to be unable to render an opinion at variance with the DOD party line. ("Operations research . . . has not outgrown its military heritage . . . many members of ORSA . . . have past or present connections with the military establishment. ORSA is not ideally positioned to adjudicate. . . .")

Mr. Wade implies that ORSA accordingly conducted a kangaroo court to convict dissenters. Among its procedural shortcomings were failure to provide council to the defense ("lack of access to the arguments of those supposedly on trial"), and prejudice due to "conflict of interest." The latter apparently refers to a possible grudge that might be held by committee member Howard Berger because when he was at the

Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) he had been "relieved . . . of responsibility" by (defendant) George Rathjens and subsequently resigned.

None of these criticisms stand up on examination. The operations research community, far from being captive to the military establishment, was as split over ABM as the country at large. Opposition was extensive and very vocal. As Wade notes, "Albert Wohlstetter . . . was *one of the few* (italics mine) scientists outside the administration to give evidence in favor of the ABM during the 1969 Senate hearings." Furthermore, although presumably Rathjens's testimony stemmed in part from IDA studies, many IDA staff differed with him.

Nor was the partiality that Wade implies actually present. Concerning the "council for the defense" (since Wade insists there was a trial), all "defendants" were invited to participate from the start and to comment on prepublication editions of the report, and all declined. What more could ORSA have done?

On the matter of Berger's conflict of interest, I can speak from firsthand knowledge. I too was at IDA at the time, a colleague of Berger and also working for Rathjens. As division director, Rathjens assigned staff to projects as new ones were authorized and old ones completed. A person reassigned could be said to be "relieved of responsibility" only in the sense that he was given a new responsibility elsewhere in the division. Such changes were commonplace events. It is ridiculous to attach significance to such an occurrence, or suggest that it implies, or could create, a grudge. It is likewise irrelevant that Berger eventually moved on. So did Rathjens. So did I.

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Highway Travel Subsidies

Constance Holden is much too gentle with Frank Barr's claim that highway travel pays its own way (Letters, 17 Sept., p. 1082). Highway travel is heavily subsidized in a number of sometimes rather subtle ways, but that portion of highway travel that is most immediately competitive with mass transit, rush-hour commuting in private automobiles, is subsidized to a disastrously overwhelming extent.