

A threat to scientific communication

The American tradition of freedom of scientific communication is seriously threatened. Since 1980 hundreds of scientists and engineers have been pressured into withdrawing unclassified contributions from conferences. Scientists from foreign countries have been barred from attending meetings in the US. Increasingly, researchers are accepting government contracts that abridge their traditional freedom to disseminate the products of their endeavor. There can be no greater threat to the progress of science than interference with the process of open encounter between scientists. One has only to look at those occasions when oppressive governments have stifled communication to see the chaos engendered and the concomitant weakening and even failure of the science involved.

Few scientists seriously question the need to restrain the flow of technical information that is classified for reasons of national security. In recent years, however, the US government has extended its controls to include more and more unclassified information. This uncertainty over what information is controlled and what is not has resulted in a "chilling effect" that extends far beyond the immediate targets of the censors. On a number of occasions in the past two years, conference organizers have taken steps to minimize the threat of government intervention by restricting sessions—and even entire conferences—to US citizens only (see *PHYSICS TODAY*, June, page 55).

Membership in The American Physical Society is open to scientists of all nations, and the benefits of Society membership are available equally to all members. The position of The American Physical Society is clear. Submission of any material to APS for presentation or publication makes it available for general dissemination. So that there could be no doubt as to where our Society stands on the question of open

scientific communication, the Council adopted a resolution on 20 November 1983 that concludes:

Be it therefore resolved that The American Physical Society through its elected Council affirms its support of the unfettered communication at the Society's sponsored meetings or in its sponsored journals of all scientific ideas and knowledge that are not classified.

As distasteful as closed meetings may be, however, they are only the most obvious manifestations of the chilling of scientific communication. No less pernicious is the concern of individual scientists that presentation of their results could jeopardize their funding or subject them to legal harassment. The responsibility for maintaining the openness of science lies, as it always has, with the individual scientist; but there is a collective responsibility to inform and be informed, to be supportive of individuals who stand firm and censorious when they do not, to help and be helped by sister societies—to be resolute.

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