

As a former employee of Los Alamos National Laboratory, I read the article "Missing Magazines Highlight Staff Distrust of Los Alamos Management" (PHYSICS TODAY, March 2005, page 26) with a sense of *deja vu*. The September 2001 issue of PHYSICS TODAY, which contained an article by Toni Feder quoting some of my reflections on past LANL management policies, should have arrived at the lab in early September. That issue never appeared in my mailbox, however, nor in the mailbox of any of the other many subscribers in the LANL theoretical division, as far as I could ascertain. The October issue arrived on time right at the beginning of October, and in my 11 years at LANL the September 2001 issue was the only one never delivered. I was perplexed about it at the time and contacted PHYSICS TODAY requesting that a replacement issue be sent to a different address.

I'm certainly a coincidence theorist, so it remains 150% inconceivable that LANL could have a policy of suppressing distribution of PHYSICS TODAY, no matter how disreputable the current laboratory director may regard it to be. But even if such suppression were the case, it would be far from the most capricious of poli-

cies experienced by employees there.

When I arrived at LANL in 1990, the laboratory offered a most promising research environment, as it continued its diversification from pure weapons work in the aftermath of the cold war. The Wen Ho Lee security nonscandal of the late 1990s, however, left it a shaken institution.

I departed the laboratory in the fall of 2001, concerned that it would be many years before that earlier positive environment could be restored, and that any restoration would require unerring management, ample funding, and plenty of luck. I was not optimistic about the probability of any one of the three, much less all three together. But I had not imagined just what a challenge the first would prove to be, with the accounting nonscandal of 2002 exposing to the outside world the continued lack of informed decision-making process, ignorance of actual working conditions, and lack of coherence from week to week. The current director, G. Peter Nanos, has achieved only the remarkable feat of making his predecessors' tenure appear unerring, at least by comparison.

Although some of the wounds have been self-inflicted, many of LANL's underlying difficulties result from inconsistent directives from Congress

and funding agencies, sometimes the result of high-level political infighting. LANL remains an institution with pockets of world-class scientific excellence embedded in an institutional structure that effectively hinders rather than nurtures them. But what is left at an institution when all those who can secure high-quality jobs elsewhere choose to do so, and where does that leave our national security interests?

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