

November 23, 2001

Dr. Bruce Alberts, President
National Academy of Sciences
2101 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20418

Dear Dr. Alberts:

The enclosed letter, published in PS earlier this year, discusses the derailing of American social science during the past two decades. The distressing history of stagnation and institutional destruction began when a breakdown of intellectual integrity and deficient courage in a National Academy of Sciences/ National Research Council Report redirected our national funding priorities, signaled a political retreat, and started a downward cascade.

Dr. Alberts, it is time for you to withdraw this mistaken and destructive Report. It slowed the rate of scientific progress and deeply harmed universities and people by redirecting research to politically neutered topics. It abandoned young scientists on the battlefield, deeply misused the credibility of your members, and cued others to imitate the role of the Establishment advisers in the children's story, *The Emperor's New Clothes*.

It was the Academy's choice to use its extraordinary prestige to control national funding priorities for the social and behavioral sciences. Now, it is your responsibility to clean-up the mess; and to make amends for the damage you caused by the original Report and compounded by the failure to withdraw it.

Look at this in the light of history: If you had an opportunity to test whether the Earth was round or flat; or whether the Sun revolved around the Earth, or vice versa; would not the right answer be to recommend reality testing? Now, look at what you did and ask yourself: What sort of people have we become? You knew the right answer but (at the highest level) walked away from the Western intellectual tradition - and also two decades of your students who are

the Academy's victims and have loud, policy argument television with simple recycling ideas, and no datasets or textbooks that evaluate key claims.

When you revisit this issue, please honor requirements of justice and due process. Earlier, guilty and compromised men remained in power and misused their offices to paralyze and defeat the self-correcting mechanisms of science. Arguments were circulated in private without an ability to respond, and defenses were authored by lawyers (e.g., that the required people had signed-off on the Report) that evaded the scientific issues and would have been an embarrassment if made in print to the wider scientific community.

As the publication in PS and background Website show, it is inevitable that the history will come to light. Concerns about the Academy's deficient standards have been raised with the editorial boards of major newspapers, foundations, Congress, and the Executive Branch. You will already have seen, over your tenure, a diminution of respect for the Academy's recommendations. This may be your last institutional chance to be honest and restore high standards of integrity before historians and political scientists, doing their jobs, effect a public discrediting. Once, Academy membership was considered (with the rare exception of Richard Feynman) an honor; next, members on every campus will face skeptical and questioning colleagues and students.

As you engage due process to withdraw (and apologize publicly for) the Luce-Smelser Report, you should weigh the deficiency that it also mistakenly served the comfort of many distinguished social scientists in the Academy, whose life's work assumed paradigms that might have been proven wrong by now. Reaganomics, for example, tried to change national modal personality and motivational variables by cutting-back the welfare state. Yet these psychological variables are assumed (i.e., without data) to be exogenous by most of your economists and theorists of American politics. Physics advanced by the Michelson-Morley experiment: your members in the natural sciences should be informed and know that the Academy's prestige also was used wrongfully to slam the door against well-founded tests of competing, legitimate and important hypotheses.

Yours truly,

(Dr.) Lloyd S. Etheredge, Director
Government Learning Project