Innovation/national security

SIR: According to Wil Lepkowski in his thoughtful article, "Innovation and national security: a complex relationship," (C&EN, July 17, page 24) assistant secretary for science and technology Jordan Baruch "seems to have a unique opportunity to contribute original thought to the innovation process, rather than simply to retread ground covered in the past by, for example, his colleague in the Commerce Department, Michael Boretsky, and his predecessors in the job." I doubt it. Dr. Baruch is unlikely to find new or better ideas than those published just 17 months ago in a study (U.S. Technology Policy, U.S. Department of Commerce, March 1977) directed by his most recent predecessor (me) and contributed to by 90 experts in industry, academia, and government. Indeed, he'll have to turn for help to many of the same people—people who must be congratulated for their endurance and forbearance, it seems. In my opinion, beginning with the still completely timely Charpie Report Lepkowski cited, enough systematic study on innovation exists. What is lacking is an *evaluation* of the well-known policy options and some *action* on the selected ones.

Not only is the study headed by Baruch wastefully focused on obtaining more information, but the answers to the questions the White House poses, as listed by Lepkowski, are largely self-evident:

- Are new or revised government policies needed to increase industrial R&D efforts consistent with meeting national goals?
  —clearly "yes" with emphasis on *revised*;
- Are similar policies needed to increase the investment, entrepreneurial, informational, technological, or other capacities needed for the development and utilization of innovations?
  —is another study really needed to answer with a resounding "yes?";
- What is the optimal level and scope of direct federal participation in the innovation process?
  —surely removal of *direct* obstacles is what's required;
- Are significant changes needed in current policies and procedures to minimize contradicting impacts and maximize mutual support?
  —see second response above;

and so on.

Lepkowski, as his editors also note, has raised a deeper issue, namely the relation between innovation and national security. His panel of experts join him in seeing a connection, but it's not clear from the questions posed by the White House that it does.

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SIR: I read your editorial (C&EN, July 17, page 5) with only mild interest—possibly because of a long-held aversion to epistles signed anonymously; i.e., "DON'T SPIT ON THE FLOOR—The Management."

Your News Feature of the same issue, page 24, was extremely interesting, not only for what it contained, but for what it did not contain. Innovation and national security *is* a complex relationship.

I have been rereading Ortega y Gasset's "Revolt of the Masses" and de Tocqueville's "Democracy in America" for the first time in 10 years. Since I first read them in 1940–42, when the concepts they espoused were new to me, but plausible, I've reread them every once in a while to see how far we have progressed along the lines they predicted. To me, the problems we face as a nation are the result of a takeover of all functions by the mass mind. John T. Conner was the only one who alluded to this in his "the drift toward egalitarianism. . . ." Egalitarianism is diametrically opposed to innovation. The innovator must think as an elite one. H. L. Mencken would have properly and interestingly told us this today, perhaps in some such words as these: "I predicted in 1936 that the net result of more democracy in these United States (a democrat will not tolerate anyone who knows more than anybody can know—even the least of us) would be that we would elect a moron to the White House: well, by damn, we've almost made it."

The "major threats" (on pages 28–29 of your article) are mostly symptoms—results of a deficiency. None of these can be cured without correcting a basic deficiency and this was not even listed in the "basic categories to be studied"—EDUCATION! Classic basic education: which recognizes that we are not all equal in abilities, and deliberately lets minds stretch as far as possible. Those who go the distance *will eventually innovate* if placed in a nonegalitarian atmosphere and given the tools and the rewards.

If I were an innovator in government and asked to study the current problem, I would say to myself: Let's forget the mass-mind popular experts and talk to the educated minority. We've tried Keynes and Friedman and it doesn't work—let's consult Sennholz. We've listened to Dewey and the National Education Association and we've given social passes to enough egalitarian ignoramuses—let's consult the Council for Basic Education. We've tried Dulles and Kissinger and the United Nations—Let's see

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Letter to the Editor

C&EN encourages readers to contribute to this letters section. However, please keep letters reasonably short, 400 words or fewer. As we receive a heavy volume of letters, persons writing letters are limited, as a general rule, to one letter within any given six-month period.

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what Russell Kirk and THE CENTER have to say.

As to William S. Sneath's "Lack of a common national purpose," we need a Caesar and we keep electing Neros; we need Wyatt Earps and we keep advancing Lil Abners to the front.

And so on in all categories—as long as the mass mind predominates.

To the members of President Carter's team, one can only say "Good Luck."

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