
Editorial Introduction

Most of you have hopefully heard about the recent protest movement among French researchers. It even was supported in a recent Editorial of the scientific journal *Nature*: the March 11th Editorial was entitled “Time for a French revolution”. The author emphasized that “France’s scientists take to the streets more readily than most, but are now rightly confronting a neglectful government. They should resist short-term concessions unless these help to secure the long-term health of research.”

The spark was yet another declaration of our president ensuring that research was one of the government’s highest priorities, while at the same time we learned that our budgets for 2004 would again be cut by some 20 to 30%.

But the baseline is really the short-term view of French politicians and its most prominent and terrible consequence is the difficulty of funding young researchers: even if you are lucky enough to find a good student who is willing to do research, and who can find some funding for her/his PhD, the chances that she/he will be able to later find a position in academia are close to zero. It seems that the situation is not much better at the European level than at the French level: young scientists flee Europe as well (see the article “How To Plug Europe’s Brain Drain” in Jan. 13, 2004 edition of *Time* magazine).

Could the United States be a paradise for research? I will not take the risk of starting a debate about which of the two (very different) systems is best. Let me just put forth that there are different threats on the incoming brain drain on the US side of the Atlantic Ocean too, which are related to some recent political decisions (see the article “In race for international students, US erects hurdles and loses out” by Philip G. Altbach in the March 16, 2004 edition of *The Christian Science Monitor*).

However, another related issue is even more frightening in the long run: faith in science has now become an outdated concept. The number of scientific vocations has steadily decreased during the last 10-20 years. Even without mentioning extreme religious positions, Science is mostly viewed by young people as “too difficult, not for me ...”. They largely prefer to take their chances at simpler activities like sports or show business, at least in our Western civilized world.

Note that this is not completely new: the Roman emperors had already understood that, when providing *panem and circenses* to the people ... shortly before the collapse of their empire.

And now? Well, we cannot just sit there and watch the world moving around us, hoping to stay away from those secular convulsions. It is our responsibility, as scientists, to make the effort to explain to both the decision makers and the public (our family, our friends, our neighbors ...) what exactly we are doing, and to convince them that it is important for the future of the world.

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April 2, 2004
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