

with the many faculty members who continue to complain about invasion of privacy, paperwork and obstacles to industrial cooperation. It is time for them and a still reluctant University of California administration to come to grips with reality: the commission is past discussing whether the rules are necessary (they are) and has turned now to asking whether they are sufficient. To ignore this reality is to continue arguing yesterday's case.

Under the rules adopted a year ago, faculty members are still shielded from the full force of the state political reform acts. While professional employees elsewhere in the government must file annual financial disclosures of their interest in any corporation likely to be affected by their official actions, faculty members are required only to reveal interests in a research sponsor, and only when submitting a new grant to the university for approval. Statistics up to the end of May show 4,340 statements filed, 210 of which indicate some financial interest (consulting, investment or service in some official capacity) in the sponsor. Approximately half were trivial, membership of the board of a sponsor such as the American Heart Association for example. The university and the commission have drawn up a list of such charitable organizations and are exempting their grants from review by the university committees set up to examine cases where financial interests are reported. The commission may next week dispense with even the filing requirement for such grants.

But another 100 or so positive responses involved private sponsors and some of these were far from trivial. And in three cases, the review committees (which include faculty, staff and students) have insisted upon substantial changes in the terms of a grant before approving them. Two recent instances at the Berkeley campus are especially instructive. Professor Milt Schroth of the plant pathology department was not allowed to accept an \$89,000 grant from Advanced Genetic Systems, a company in which he owns stock and for which he serves as a scientific adviser. Schroth agreed to step aside as principal investigator, although he will still be involved in the research, which concerns plant-root colonizing bacteria. In the other case, the committee insisted on the removal of a restriction clause in a contract from seven minerals companies to Professor H. Frank Morrison that would have blocked publication of computer codes used in the research unless the sponsors gave their permission. Despite Morrison's increasingly irate complaints — which culminated in a letter to the university's chancellor accusing the committee of pettiness and vindictiveness and complaining that such action would only "senselessly antagonize sincere supporters of university research" — the committee held its ground and left no doubt that it would approve the deal only if the clause was dropped. It was.

In the light of the result, Morrison's complaints have a hollow ring to them; likewise, the grumbling heard from the university administration about paperwork and "only" turning up three doubtful cases in a year are less than convincing. The system works; fairness and academic freedom have been served and research support has not ultimately suffered. Instead of flogging a dead horse, the academic community in California — and elsewhere for that matter — would do well to accept limited financial disclosures and scrutiny of research arrangements for conflicts of interest as an accomplished fact, and expend some serious thought on some of the more subtle issues raised by the new university-industry ties. Professor Leon Wofsy of Berkeley has pointed out several of these: the growing tendency to measure success by the ability to swing deals, rather than to publish good research; the effects of patents and licensing arrangements on research and institutional decisions at the university; and the subtle subjugation of peer review to administrative fiat when large sums are involved. (Wofsy tells of being called recently, along with a dozen other members of his department, to a meeting with the dean to hear of the intention of one company to support half a dozen research projects with grants of \$30,000–\$40,000 each. In these no doubt special circumstances, peer review took the simplified form of the dean's nomination of those who would be invited to apply for grants in a competition with a 50:50 chance of success.) Plainly, sheer financial conflict of interests is just the tip of the iceberg. □

Technology and hanging

The clamour to bring back the death penalty in Britain overlooks new technological opportunities.

ONE of the predictable consequences of the British Conservative Party's massive parliamentary majority in last month's general election is the resurgence of political interest in capital punishment, which ceased to be a criminal sentence in 1965. Since then, there have been three occasions when the House of Commons has voted to confirm the disuse of the death penalty. The new development is that many of the new members of the House of Commons are said to have won their chance to represent the Conservative Party at the election by promising local selection committees to support the hangman's return in the "free" vote on the subject which the government foolishly promised in its election manifesto.

There are several dangers in this development, not the least of which is that the Conservative Government's hope to be known as a go-ahead high-tech government ("cabling Britain" and all that) will be tarnished if it is now seen to derive its political power from people attached to an old-fashioned technology such as hanging. Although the secrecy surrounding prison executions has allowed the boast that "British hangmen are best", it is unfortunately known that the technology leaves much to be desired. The procedure is intended to break a person's neck, but its effectiveness depends to some extent on the angle at the bottom of what is called "the drop" between the plane of the rope and the dorsal-ventral plane through the spine. This is why a good hangman must be an agile fellow, able to leap from his scaffold to hang on the legs of a subject not killed outright. Can even the newest members of the House of Commons ask their government to administer such an empirical technology?

Unfortunately, there is little help to be won from experience elsewhere, even in the United States. The patchy return of capital punishment in various states has revealed that even the once widely practised technique of electrocution has its defects, perhaps because the untrained prison guards are out of practice, while the outwardly more up to date technology of a massive intravenous infusion of barbiturates followed by toxins has been impeded by unskilled people's difficulties in finding veins as well as by problems with piping and the like. It would, however, be a serious setback for a government pretending to be technologically up to date to have to fall back on an old-fashioned method. The hanging lobby in the House of Commons must quickly say which technology it wishes to be practised.

It must also come to some kind of a conclusion about publicity for capital punishment. The promises that have been given to constituency parties about the restoration of the death penalty appear to have sprung from the demand that "tough measures" should be seen to be taken on "law and order". Especially because the present government has pinned its faith on the engineering of a communications revolution, it is only natural that it should be anxious to demonstrate its practice of the toughness asked of it by using the new communications technology to make executions discreetly public, perhaps by compelling the operators of the cable television systems soon to spring into being to carry video recordings of them. The snag, of course, is that the "hangers" in the new parliament include many people who also carry a torch to outlaw obscenity on public television. This is another issue on which the hanging lobby should make up its mind.

That the restoration of the death penalty would have little effect on, say, the incidence of murder in the United Kingdom (where most murders kill people with whom they are emotionally entangled), and would probably complicate the problem of terrorism by making martyrs of those terrorists who were caught and convicted, will no doubt dominate the debate in the House of Commons now being planned. The dangers inherent in the plan to bring back an old-fashioned technology are being overlooked. The danger that the hanging lobby may prevail numerically is, fortunately, more clearly perceived. □