

ASB: AN UMBRELLA

To the editor:

The ASB is a terrific suggestion. Perhaps the most effective function of the association would be to act as an umbrella society for the various technical societies. This might be a difficult structure to build because of the individual aspirations of each society, but the ASB could provide a forum for discussion. The best starting point might be to have a meeting with the presidents of all the interested societies.

Will you take on industrial activities like the Association of Biotechnology Companies (ABC) and the Industrial Biotechnology Association (IBA), or will the focus be primarily scientific? I would suggest that the association have a strong research footing by affiliating itself with the various interdisciplinary societies already in existence. The information generated by this new inter-disciplinary group would automatically serve to draw the attention of industrial concerns.

As in any "high-technology" industry, the research community sets biotech's trends, and then the business community adapts to them. Neither the ABC nor the IBA have the technical expertise (nor the focus) that the ASB could generate through affiliation with existing technical societies.

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ASB: EDUCATIONAL ROLE

To the editor:

"And now, what about leaving things just as they are? That is what most people vote for doing. Even when they don't like what they are accustomed to, they dread change, lest it should make matters worse. They are what they call Conservative, though it is only fair to add that no Conservative statesman in his senses ever pretends (except perhaps occasionally at election times, when nobody ever tells the truth) that you can conserve things by simply letting them alone."

—George Bernard Shaw, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*

It does seem, as a first response, that the desire to form another professional society is wisely resisted, and that the existing societies now serving the various disciplines important to biotechnology can adequately cover the needs of the industry. The reasons cited in March's "First Word" for a new organization are strong, however, and make the case for a dedicated biotechnology society.

I would like to underscore the need for professional oversight and stan-

dards in educational programs at all academic levels. New generations of educated students will not only develop into the biotechnologists of the future but will provide the sophisticated consumers that can have no patience with "Rifkinisms" based on ignorance and misinformation.

Information and understanding will provide the popular support that biotechnology will need to develop fully. The subject's inherent flexible and wide-ranging structure should naturally provide for change and growth and make room for a new American Society for Biotechnology.

Times change. Needs change. And we need to evolve new organizations to cope with these changes and to enjoy the excitement of moving forward with the growth of the industry. Shaw would agree: "Changeable women, for instance, are more enduring than monotonous ones, however unpleasant some of their changes may be: they are sometimes murdered but seldom deserted..." (*Ibid.*)

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