

Science and Ideology

Abha Sur moderating

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**How Did/Do We Do
“Science for the People”?
The Role of Ideology**

Katherine Yih

April 12, 2014

SftP was part of a larger social movement...

- Against the American war in Vietnam
 - Anti-imperialist
- Against production for profit
 - Anti-capitalist
- Pro-people
 - Labor
 - People of color
 - Women
- Pro-nature

SftP mission statement

SftP is an organization of people involved or interested in science and technology-related issues, whose activities are directed at

- 1) exposing the class control of science and technology,
- 2) organizing campaigns which criticize, challenge and propose alternatives to the uses of science and technology, and
- 3) developing a political strategy by which people in the technical strata can ally with other progressive forces in society.

SftP opposes the ideologies of sexism, racism, elitism, and their practice, and holds an anti-imperialist world-view.

Two important ideological notions guiding us in SftP

- We live in a class society, defined by the exploitation of one class by another
 - Defined further by oppression on the basis of other attributes, most notably race/ethnicity and sex/gender
- Science and technology are not politically neutral
 - Interests of those holding power are reflected in
 - Funding
 - Social organization of science institutions and departments
 - Applications and patterns of who benefits and who suffers
 - The very content of scientific theories and technologies themselves

Dual nature of science

Our actions were at least implicitly informed by (in Dick Levins' words) the single contradictory proposition that all science is class science, yet science also finds out real truths about the world

SftP activities (1 of 2): Critique

Activity informed by ideology	Examples
Critique exclusive and oppressive <u>social relations</u> in science practice	Sexism in the laboratory
Critique anti-people <u>science and technology</u> (theories, applications, consequences) and power relations underlying them	Militarism Sociobiology Toxic contamination from for-profit and other industrial production
Critique military/corporate control of scientific <u>knowledge production</u> (including use of public resources)	Corporate funding of research on campus to gain access to public resources, e.g. for anti-labor mechanization of agricultural work

SftP activities (2 of 2):

Building a liberatory science

Activity informed by ideology	Examples
Develop new allegiances and alliances with organized progressive sectors, and use science to serve these allies	Occupational health and safety with unions, Science for Vietnam, Science for Nicaragua, NWAEG
Reject oppressive social hierarchies to create a participatory and just science practice	Establishing radically egalitarian science workplaces Challenging deference to 1 st World science
Pose new questions and objects of study	Many practical examples, but also more theoretical ones, e.g. altruism as object of study instead of competition (in ecology)
Develop new scientific theory and methods	The study of complexity
Bring science education to traditionally excluded sectors	Science education in inner-city schools Collaborative research and teaching in revolutionary societies
Teach to expose the class control of science and technology	Feed, Need, Greed Many courses taught by former SftP members

The kind of science we struggle for must break decisively from bourgeois science in the following ways: ...

- It must be frankly partisan. A good working hypothesis is that all theories are false which promote, justify, or tolerate oppression. The wrongness may be in the data, its interpretation, or its application, but if we search for the wrongness, we will also be led to truth.

Furthermore, in choosing research, we have to ask, if this line of work is successful, what will it do for people, not in terms of narrow practicality alone, but also in terms of understanding or obfuscating the world?

--Dick Levins