

As there is need to submit comments to IARC promptly, I offer this rough note in the hope that it will be germane to the redrafting of the IARC preamble.

Observers

Observers have been intrusive at IPCS scientific meetings on Environmental Health Criteria, where disparate evidence required to be appraised before arriving at a consensus on an intellectually honest basis. This was particularly noisome when the Chairman was so ineffective as to allow industry representatives to attempt to dominate the discussion and to influence the working group's decision, even to the extent of unilaterally attempting to revise IARC's categorization of an agent's carcinogenicity. Academic departments and research institutions that once were able to maintain their independence by being core funded by the State, are now required to be revenue earners, and where else can they look other than to increasingly politicized government departments and to industry?

The independent research scientist who opposes the arguments of members of the working party with industry "interests" (declared or undeclared), already does so at the peril of his or her institute. The presence of industry observers may not be significantly more damning to the prospect of the independent scientist in need of a research project or programme for survival.

Having thrown open the IARC review process unilaterally to industry for a number of years (autres temps, autres moeurs), while this privilege could not be withdrawn without considerable unpleasantness, today it would be egalitarian to balance up the interests. Where IARC staff members (and for that matter the academic members of the working group) feel that their intervention in a contentious area may be perceived by industry as partisan, the presence of an effective alternative voice at the meeting able to speak up without fear, will save them both from embarrassment.

Not only are Industry observers no charge on IARC's funds, but they have even been known to come bearing as gifts draft documents to ILO/WHO committees, a practice it is to be hoped will not be repeated.

There is a cynical British aphorism that Justice is available to all, much as tea is at the Ritz. Observers acceptable to those who might be deemed to be of "interests" opposed to industry, could be found to balance matters: they would require to serve pro bono, but it would be necessary for WHO/IARC to meet modest travel and subsistence expenses, in the event of such individuals not readily being able to afford to attend - the funding of activist organizations may be too exiguous to field a representative unaided.

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