

Editorial

One of the characteristics of the relations between East and West before the momentous events of 1991 in Europe was the lack of participation, not just of scientists but of academics of all types from the Soviet Bloc in international meetings. Sometimes there would be reports of Russian or other Soviet citizens being prevented from leaving their country to attend an important Congress or Conference in the West, usually accompanied by much criticism from their Western counterparts and protestations that academic freedom was at stake. The Western world, while decrying this restraint on fellow researchers, had its own form of restriction; for example, the United States made it illegal to sell computers made in America to the Soviet Union. This restriction was so tightly applied that purchasers in other countries were not allowed to buy such equipment, unless they agreed not to sell to any third party not approved by the United States. However, there was always the hope that someday these restrictions on the academic community, in all their manifestations, would be totally free of the constraints of such national boundaries.

With the collapse of the Communist systems in eastern Europe and the openness of the new regimes, the new freedom was eagerly welcomed, by both sides of the former divide of the so-called cold war. It was not just the freedom that was welcomed; there was also an expectation that all that research previously unavailable to the West would now be released, ripe for consideration, helping the advance of knowledge with a considerable new impetus. For the more commercially minded there was the hope of the exploitation of new markets as the east developed, and the hope of new exploitable ideas arising from the east.

Perhaps these expectations were unrealistic. After all, most of us are aware of the phenomenon of simultaneous invention. Sometimes the time itself just seems right for a new invention and the invention arises simultaneously in two different places, not even triggered by the same event somewhere else. One would almost have the impression, that a new invention was not the result of a logical sequence of assemblage of knowledge; merely increasing the knowledge base would have little difference on the rate of new discoveries. It was also very clear that there was no particular area of research where the former Soviet Union was so pre-eminent that there was a flood of new knowledge available to the west. We should have been well warned of this. In the first tentative collaborations between the Soviets and the United States, the astronauts reported how surprised they were at the primitive-

ness of the cosmonauts' space-ships, and of course the demand by the Russian government for the commercially available computers from the United States did not suggest a world leadership in computer science.

There is, it is true, a vast Russian archive in science that could contain gems of use to today's scientists, but I suspect this is true of all societies. How often does a bright new idea turn out to have been presaged in a dusty volume unread for fifty years, but still clearly written, in English, for all to see?

But is this expectation of the more obvious benefits obscuring something more important in the new openness? Perhaps it is not more of the same that we should hope for, but a new approach, an approach only possible from the true lateral thinker, or the man—or woman—from a different culture? Perhaps it is the software we should look at, not the hardware.

At the time of writing, the 130th British Pharmaceutical Conference is due to take place in Reading and there may be a chance at this Conference to reflect on unconventional approaches to conventional problems. At this Conference Professor N. B. Leonidov of Moscow will describe his research on the stabilization of conformers of organic molecules in solution leading to dramatic extensions of the use of existing drugs; the Editorial staff of this Journal provides the secretariat for this Conference, hence the privileged advanced information. Professor Leonidov's work has not previously been described outside the Soviet Union, although it has been well-recognized by his peers within those former boundaries. The Poster session at the British Pharmaceutical Conference will undoubtedly create much interest, not to say controversy. At first sight, the thesis of stabilization of conformers being carried on from formulation to the active site seems incompatible with the conventional wisdom of what we think happens to small organic molecules in solution; surely, we think, once the molecule is in solution, it will take up whatever conformation is dictated by the laws of thermodynamics? Nevertheless, Professor Leonidov has provided impressive clinical evidence for his new approach. I would not be the first scientist to have been proved wrong after being quite sure he was right—nor would it be the first time it had happened to me! I await the full unveiling of his methods with great interest.

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