



SID FERNBACH  
(1917-1991)



idea of borrowing the CRAY1 to try it out before making a commitment, but Livermore already had so many other machines that it was tried out at Los Alamos. Similarly, the first large parallel machine, the ILLIAC IV, although again not a success, was not delivered to Livermore, so as to give others a chance. The general purpose massively parallel computer has yet to be built and Sid, rising to the challenge, if given a chance, would have pushed the technology in both software and hardware to make it happen as fast as possible. He pushed the technology to make faster printers and massive storage devices. He would not let a machine cycle go to waste, but allowed free standby for exploratory scientific research to fill up the machine. The lack of idle time also helped justify the acquisition of ever bigger machines.

Sid was a curmudgeon on the outside and a pussycat on the inside. He had no tolerance for hypocrisy or for playing politics. This, perhaps, explains the relatively few public honors he received considering that he was such a doer and shaker. He was a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and of the American Physical Society. He received the E. O. Lawrence Award and the R. Merwin Award of the Institute of Electronic and Electrical Engineering for, among other things, organizing and chairing the COMPCON meetings in 1973 and 1976 for that society. He was a consultant to many organizations including the Departments of Defense, Energy, and Commerce, to decide, for example, what computers to sell to third world countries. He was the leadoff witness for the Justice Department in its antitrust suit against IBM, which was ultimately dismissed.

Sid was not only a good father to his three children, Paul, Barbara, and Wendy, but also a father figure for many young computational scientists. He had a dry sense of humor and loved good food and wine, often steering people down the road from the Laboratory to a good winery. While attending a wine tasting event, he once passed off a bottle of inexpensive supermarket wine. His reputation as a wine connoisseur was such that all agreed his entry was best. He carried off such pranks always with a poker face. He played poker in the computer field in order to increase the power of the computers and to improve their accessibility to the user. In a similar vein, the founding of the Journal was preceded by a series of books on "Methods in Computational Physics" in order to spread the knowledge of the power of the computer in solving problems, in this particular instance, fluid mechanics problems, that had been studied in secrecy during the war and for some years thereafter. In order to spread the word he also founded the Topical Group in Computational Physics within the American Physical Society. Sid saw the future in the computer world and spent a good part of his life making it come true.