

SRI: SEVERANCE OR TIGHTER AFFILIATION?  
(or "On the Handling of Contradictions in the SRI Report")

"This nation occupies 6% of the land area of the world, has 7% of the world's population, but it now produces 50% of the world's goods and possesses 67% of the world's wealth. Research must be the heart, the foundation, the lifeblood of our present defense economy if we are to maintain this position."

Jesse Hobson, Director of SRI in 1951

Since its inception in 1946, SRI has moved from doing retail marketing research into doing weapons systems research, chemical-biological warfare research, counter-insurgency research, and investment studies supporting U.S. corporations' further economic penetration of Southeast Asia and other Third World countries. The SRI Report attempted to suggest solutions to the problem of SRI's future.

Positions and solutions can be divided between two and sometimes three factions in the Committee: the radical position of Cleaver, Bauer, and Bernstein, and the liberal-conservative position of the majority, with Lyman and Scott tending to the right of the majority.

1. Lyman and Scott's motivation was to maximize the financial gains to the University resultant from outright sale, only minimally restricted if at all: "Either destructive retention or gratuitous severance from the University of a capital asset with a value of from \$25 million to \$45 million seems a course hardly deserving any consideration by responsible men."

2. The majority's concern lay more with the effects of SRI's influence on a "neutral educational institution" model of Stanford, generally stressing the academic inappropriateness of industrially-biased or defense-biased research to that model. They hoped that a sale with restrictive covenant could be worked out so to eliminate CBW and some counter-insurgency, as well as Vietnam-related research. (See below for legal aspects)

Their basic argument was that SRI provided applied research opportunities, consultantships, and other economic or technical benefits to Stanford faculty and students while hurting Stanford's reputation by doing work that they implied was intellectually and/or morally questionable. They asserted that Stanford's and SRI's problems were largely due to their legal relationship, and so they attempted a compromise which depended upon the restrictive covenant to solve the moral and political costs of the SRI-Stanford relationship.

3. The radical position stressed the political and moral shallowness of Stanford's attempts to sell SRI when it was so largely responsible both legally and historically for creating SRI. It documented the costs to the Third World of both Stanford's and SRI's research, and foresaw that as knowledge of both Stanford's and SRI's moral-political functions grew, so would guidelines have to be creatively established. They opposed severance even with a restrictive covenant because 1) it would be enforceable only by or through the Trustees, against whose vested interests it was directed, and 2) it could be fought by SRI in the courts while the CBW, COIN and classified contracts continued unchecked. "The University cannot simply create powerful institutions and then, by act of sale, deny all moral and political responsibility for their predictable future actions." Obviously, rehabilitation of both Stanford and SRI would demand belt-tightening and changes in plans for massive building and growth (more will be forthcoming on these economic plans soon). Closer ties and massive reorientation of priorities were suggested by the minority report.