

AAAS Wields the Censor's Hammer on U.S. Population Issues

by Stuart H. Hurlbert

Californians for Population Stabilization, CAPS Blog, February 11, 2016

<http://www.capsweb.org/blog/aaas-wields-censor%E2%80%99s-hammer-us-population-issues>

The U.S. mothership for science, the American Association for Advancement of Science, convenes in DC this week (February 11-15) for its annual meeting. But all is not well with AAAS, though for reasons still little known outside the environmental science community. The issues are of high relevance to all of society.

Human population growth and its environmental and economic impacts are among the most critical issues for the planet. **Over the last four years three different population-focused NGOs have tried to have exhibitor booths at AAAS meetings. All have been turned down.** The 2011 battles by Californians for Population Stabilization and Population Institute Canada to have booths at the 2012 AAAS meeting in Vancouver have been recounted elsewhere (1), as has AAAS's exclusion of substantive discussion of U.S. population growth and policies from its flagship journal, *Science* (2).

Most scientists scream bloody murder when others suppress knowledge. But a few are in fact happy to censor when it suits their own ideological predispositions.

One positive consequence of those earlier battles was the formation of a new national NGO, Scientists and Environmentalists for Population Stabilization (SEPS). SEPS now educates people not only on population issues but on the problem of censorship by scientists of other scientists as well.

SEPS applied for a booth at the 2014 AAAS meeting in Chicago and was rejected. So when it applied for one at the 2016 AAAS meeting in Washington DC it listed in its application the 19 scientific societies that since 2012 have warmly welcomed SEPS exhibitor booths at their meetings. No society other than AAAS has ever rejected a booth application from SEPS.

The 2016 application also listed 40 current or former presidents of scientific societies who were endorsing SEPS' application. These included several distinguished past and present members of my own San Diego scientific community such as: Michael Soulé, former UCSD professor and founding president of the Society for Conservation Biology and the Wildlife Network, Margaret Leinen, director of the Scripps Institute of Oceanography and current president of the American Geophysical Union, John Rieger, former SDSU grad student and founding president of the Society for Ecological Restoration, Peter Jumars, former SIO grad student and past president of the American Society for Limnology and Oceanography, Edith Allen, former SDSU professor and past president of the Soil Ecology Society, and Dennis Murphy, former SDSU grad student and past president of the Society for Conservation Biology.

But no luck. The narrow-mindedness of AAAS staff once again trumped the judgment of large numbers of top scientists both in and out of SEPS, including the meeting organizers of 19 other societies.

Pretexts offered by AAAS for application rejections have been diverse, disingenuous and puzzling (1).

For the 2016 meeting, AAAS CEO Rush Holt claimed that rejection of SEPS' application was "based on the mission, focus and actions of your organization."

So let's see what is causing all this fear and trembling at AAAS.

SEPS mission statement as given on its website is this: *Our mission is to improve understanding within the U.S. scientific, educational and environmental communities of the fact of overpopulation and*

its social, economic and environmental consequences at both national and global levels. We advocate for U.S. population stabilization followed by its gradual reduction to a sustainable level by humane, non-coercive means.

SEPS “focus” is on the U.S. because so long as our own population policies are so dysfunctional we have no standing to advise or interfere in the population politics of other nations though SEPS booths do provide abundant information on them as well.

For the U.S. SEPS advocates a return to moderate levels of immigration (as have many other NGOs, past national commissions, politicians and environmental scientists), tax incentives for small families, and unfettered access of people to family planning advice and services. It also advocates moving the U.S. and the world toward ecological economics, a system that provides prosperity without depending on every generation having more workers, consumers and taxpayers than the last.

SEPS only “actions,” other than maintaining a skeletal website, are operation of SEPS exhibitor booths at the annual meetings of societies, mainly those in the environmental sciences. These booths have graphical displays, book displays with 20-30 titles, and literature displays with copies of 70-100 articles, op eds, charts, etc. free for the taking.

At any multi-day meeting the booth gives out typically 4000-7000 pieces of literature, and hosts dozens of discussions among students, professors, researchers, and others. (See photos of past booths [here](#)).

What’s not to like?

Responses from youngsters often are of the sort, “Wow, this is interesting stuff. I’m just finishing my Ph.D. in ecology, but these topics aren’t covered in any of the courses at my university, and weren’t at my undergrad school either.”

Crusty old-timers are more likely to say, “Where the hell’ve you been the last thirty years?! Thanks for putting these issues back on the table. Mind if I take an extra packet of articles for a colleague?”

Such discussions seem destined to never be had in an AAAS exhibition hall.

The problem here is far bigger than rejection by AAAS of booth applications from a few NGOs. The AAAS staff and board of directors seem to have decided, surreptitiously, to exclude substantive discussion of U.S. population issues from all AAAS venues. An independent board of inquiry is needed. This behavior by AAAS has already been discussed by the board of the Council of Scientific Society Presidents. Perhaps they will bite the bullet and take up the task.

(1) Schindler, D., M. Weld and S.H. Hurlbert. 2012. American Association for the Advancement of Science (on national population policies) muffles 'obnoxious' Canadians too. *The Social Contract* 22(2): 11-25.

(2) Hurlbert, S.H. 2011. Is the AAAS oblivious to U.S. overpopulation and its consequences? Or is it just another censor? *The Social Contract* 22(1): 64-68.

Hurlbert is an emeritus professor of biology at San Diego State University, Fellow of AAAS, and president of Scientists and Environmentalists for Population Stabilization. Contact: hurlbert@mail.sdsu.edu

[NOTE: Readers and experts from around the world have added numerous comments to the online version of this article, some exceptionally illuminating.]