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A Perspective on Research at JAERI



With the three great economic areas of the world in recession, 2002 looks like a bad year to be promoting funding for basic research. Preliminary estimates for the next year's budget for the general science are not encouraging, and although the National Institute of Health still looks in good shape, who can doubt that with the surplus in the US economy gone, basic research across the board will suffer. And (often unfortunately) experience has shown that where the US leads, Europe and Japan are not far behind.

But this is exactly the wrong time to be reducing support for basic research. Enormously important discoveries still await us in both the physical and biological sciences. Of course, technology is one reason, and possibly the single most important, to fund basic research. Nanoscience, quantum computing, and genetic engineering are all examples that deserve the headlines, and great predictions have been made for all of them. Even if some fail, others will succeed. The journey is also worthwhile. Basic research is important as an activity in itself, it brings people together, across the country, across the world. It also produces serendipity: The unexpected discovery. Think of the compact disc invented by James Russell in the late 1960s, originally working at home and trying to find a way to avoid the steady wear on his vinyl records.

After the events of last September we need to bring people more together. The worst thing we can do is to build a wall around our activities and pretend the rest of the world does not exist. We need to reach out to the Middle East and try and encourage science to flourish in the schools and Universities. We need to encourage postdocs from that region to spend time in our institutions. Science, by definition, excludes the rigidity of thought that drove the tragic events of that month.

2001 saw the start in Japan of a large project that will change the face of the Tokai Establishment. The Joint Project is to build a high-power accelerator to provide a spallation source for neutron scattering, to test concepts of transmutation, and to provide beams for high-energy physics. The joining together of the STA and Monbu-sho organisations is itself an act of great significance. It brings together two rather different cultures and let us hope that the best of both will survive. Both need to strive to make it work. This is not the time for bureaucratic nitpicking, but for vision. It's a grand experiment; but so was the act of establishing the Institut Laue Langevin in 1965 between the French and Germans, and what a success that has been.

I wish all my friends in Japan the very best for 2002 and a successful year in basic research.