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REVERSAL FORECAST IN TECHNICAL SOCIETY INFLUENCE¹

Many learned societies have increasingly involved themselves in public affairs, instituted expanded professional programs and services to members, and have generally moved towards more "activist" postures. As a result membership has grown and become more diverse.

A historic reversal is in progress according to the results of a study done for the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. Dr. H. G. Boland of Columbia University and his wife, S. M. Boland, state in the 130-page report "American Learned Societies in Transition" (published by McGraw-Hill) that learned society membership and activities will contract in the next 10 years.

Unionization will be the cause. Both faculty and white-collar unionism will provide a viable alternative to learned societies as the major professional organization. White-collar unionism, for example, is anticipated to expand to include more Ph.D.'s employed by industry and government.

The Bolands say that "Societies will once again begin to focus more exclusively on activities and programs related to the advancement and diffusion of knowledge—most importantly, on the publication of journals and the arrangement of annual scholarly meetings." And societies may become "once again the more exclusive domain of eminent scholars and scientists from the nation's elite colleges and universities."

They further explain that societies have been traditionally dominated by their academic members. They have fostered national career systems in which publica-

tion in society journals, society awards, and election to society offices have led to recognition and advancement of individuals. This has often meant that societies have been governed by a small scholarly group of self-perpetuating elites.

This type of society operation was attacked by reformers and activists in the late 1960s. Varying degrees of success in democratizing society government, increasing fuller member participation, and focusing attention on political and social issues have been demonstrated.

The Bolands observe that late in 1970 political activism was in decline nationally, and an academic employment crisis became of major concern. Despite the investment of available association resources in improving job exchange services, in elaborate job market and manpower studies, in formulating recommendations for reducing graduate enrollments, and in framing guidelines for employers, disciplinary associations were generally able to do little more than reaffirm the existence of a serious job shortage."

Chemical and Engineering News checked five societies and did indeed find a decline since 1970 even though some had tremendous growth till then (e.g., American Association for Advancement of Science and American Chemical Society). Dr. Boland told *Chemical and Engineering News* that because most societies are small, they don't have the resources and capability to attend to matters relevant to their members' needs. "The grass roots people will find it harder and harder to stay members. What will be left will be the superstars."

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¹ Information developed from an article in *Chemical and Engineering News*, 11 November 1974, p. 14.