

# Book Review: “Soldiers in the Laboratory”, by Chris Langley

John Avery, Danish Peace Academy

April 26, 2005

Ideally science ought to be the disinterested study of nature; ideally universities ought to be the eyes, mind and conscience of society. Dr. Chris Langley’s brilliant and vitally important book, “Soldiers in the Laboratory”, documents the tragic erosion of these ideals during the last few decades. It describes the perversion not only of science, engineering and technology, but also of the university system itself, by the pervasive influence of the military-industrial complex.

Langley’s book (6 chapters, 87 pages) was commissioned and published by the UK-based organization, *Scientists for Global Responsibility* (SGR). Copies can be obtained for GBP 12.50 by writing to SGR at PO Box 473, Folkstone, CT20 1GS, UK. Alternatively, the report can be read on the internet. To find it, just go to Google and search for “Soldiers in the Laboratory”.

Although the details of Langley’s report deal mainly with the United Kingdom, the book also touches on what is happening to an even larger extent in the United States, and also in other countries. Academic scientists and engineers will have noticed that in recent years, tenured positions have become increasingly scarce; increasingly they are expected to finance research and salaries by means of contracts with industry. Research narrowly aimed at wealth-production is encouraged rather than fundamental science.

So far so bad, but this is only the beginning of the story. As Langley amply documents, the industrial contracts that finance so much of today’s research are often backed by military money and aimed at military goals. These goals, he shows, are not only destructive in themselves (today about 500,000 people are killed yearly by small arms), but resources used on arms

are diverted from research on the urgent problems facing humanity - food security, clean water, the resurgence of infectious disease, poverty, climate change and so on. Langley pleads for a wider definition of security, where solutions to the urgent problems just named would be seen as contributing to global stability and safety.

In Chris Langley's Chapter 4 he looks in detail at four cases where science and engineering are being cynically used in the service of war:

1. Biological sciences and the military
2. Nanotechnology - from nanotubes to the battlefield
3. Missile Defense and the securing of dominance
4. A new generation of nuclear weapons

Chapter 5 is devoted to ways in which the money that the world wastes on armaments (\$956,000,000,000 in 2003) could give us a much more meaningful security if spent constructively.

Dr. Langley deserves our gratitude for the careful study and dedication that he has put into his book. "Soldiers in the Laboratory" deserves to be read by everyone interested in academic freedom and global peace.