EDITORIAL

During last summer's lull in the British political scene the writer and analyst of city life, Colin Ward cast his eye over the 'academic publishing mafia' in his regular column in the New Statesman and Society (13 August, 1993). For nearly 20 years I have usually found myself nodding in agreement with Ward's writings but on this occasion I was provoked into scrawling a series of exclamation and question marks in the margins of his piece. I hope readers, subscribers and contributors to Policy and Politics will be interested both in Ward's points and my reactions.

'There was once a time when the journals of learned societies were published at or below cost for sheer love of the subject.' '... academic publishing has been turned into a racket by outsiders.' 'There are huge profits in journal publishing.'

I am pleased to say that Policy and Politics has chosen to remain independent of the main publishing houses and to be driven by considerations other than the profit motive. This in turn has allowed us to invest in some new technologies which help the production process while at the same time limiting the rise in subscription price – there were three years since 1980 when we were able to hold constant the price for institutions and the price for individual subscriptions remained constant between 1982 and 1985.

Colin Ward goes on to complain that both the academic editing and indeed the writing is done for free with authors obliged to assign the copyright to the publishers who then collect the fees he has to pay when photocopying articles in journals to which he can no longer afford to subscribe.

Again I am pleased to say that the copyright of papers published in Policy and Politics is vested in the authors but I doubt if many of our authors are getting rich quick on fees collected by the Copyright Licensing Agency.

Finally, he tells us that he has stopped offering contributions to such journals 'because of the insult of having my thoughts marked like a student essay by a bunch of 'referees'', all of whom had to demonstrate that they were smarter than the writer.

I must admit that some of the comments made by referees can be rather insensitive to the feelings of authors and I suspect that without the cloak of anonymity they might be more circumspect; in these cases however, I tend to exercise editorial discretion in toning down what I pass on to the author. Nevertheless, the process of seeking the views of a range of colleagues on submissions is important and helps me make decisions on the many papers that fall outside my personal fields of interest or expertise. It is clear to me that editorial judgement is essential when publishing any journal; if we accepted everything that was submitted then the task of finding 'nuggets of gold' as Ward puts it would be more difficult for all readers and would give further weight to the accusation that academic publishing is falling victim to the growing emphasis given to publications when measuring the performance of academics.

At Policy and Politics we will continue to strive to publish interesting papers which cross disciplinary boundaries, link theory and practice, and which analyse the origins, implementation and impact of a wide range of policy measures. I hope Colin Ward will find himself able to nod in agreement with me for a change.

Paul Burton