NEWS OF THE INSTITUTE

Public relations for the physics community

Cepheid variables, Friedman universes, continuous creation—these are some of the topics to be discussed at an upcoming cosmology seminar on Jan. 25 in New York City before a group of the nation's science writers. This will be the twenty-first in a series of such seminars, originated six years ago by American Institute of Physics Public Relations head Eugene Kone as a physics education program for the press. Each seminar is a day-long meeting at which a panel of four to seven specialists discuss different subareas of a single discipline.

The need for such seminars became apparent to Kone several years ago when a major industrial research organization held a press conference on a new application of semiconductors. "Many reporters at that conference," says Kone, "turned to AIP representatives in attendance and complained, 'We don't know what they're talking about. What does anisotropy mean, and majority carrier, and Hall effect?' Those journalists were being hindered in their job of reporting news of physics by lack of understanding, and Dr. Elmer Hutchisson, our director, and myself believed AIP should do something about this."

A few months later, in October 1959, AIP organized its first seminar, on solid-state physics. Since that time, a steady flow of announcements has come from AIP, informing the science-writing community of twenty seminars reflecting new developments in physics. In 1960, meetings were held for plasma physics and acoustics; 1961, spectroscopy, high-energy and nuclear physics; 1962, radio astronomy, computers, cryogenics, nucleic acids, protein chemistry, documentation, and oceanography; 1963, space physics and biophysics; 1964, accelerators, lasers, and quantum mechanics; 1965, quasars and medical physics. For 1966, seminars are planned on cosmology, and on atmospheric physics (Mar. 14, Washington, D.C.).

The National Association of Science Writers has cosponsored all the above seminars. Financial support for all but three has been received from the National Science Foundation.

Although the meetings are intended to provide background information, occasionally a new discovery is announced to the audience, as was true with stellar interlopers during the quasar seminar. Robert C. Cowen, natural-science editor of *The Christian Science Monitor*, wrote shortly after the seminar, "Astronomers have found a number of 'stars' that fit this description [of quasars] but don't coincide with known radio sources. For want of a better name, they call these objects 'interlopers'." Moreover, the seminars usually precede an AIP member-society gathering (as does the cosmology seminar) and thus help to focus press attention on society meetings. Total attendance at the meetings has amounted to about 2000 science writers and public-information officers, representing all types of media. For its initiative in developing these seminars, the AIP Public Relations Division was honored in 1961 by the Public Relations Society of America with the Silver Anvil Award.

Preparation for each seminar usually takes several months, and is begun by choice of topic. For the cosmology seminar, Kone and his assistant Audrey Meyers developed a list of possible subjects from requests for information they had received during the past year. This list was subsequently reviewed by a group of science writers and then by the advisory board to the Public Relations Division.

Once a topic is chosen, Kone and his staff ask various scientists in the subject area to select a chairman (an active worker and good communicator). The chairman then proceeds to block out the different sections of the overall field, and contacts those scientists he believes would provide a good account of those areas.

For the cosmology seminar, Engelbert L. Schücking, professor of physics at the University of Texas, has consented to serve as chairman. His group will include Philip Morrison, professor of physics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Rainer K. Sachs, professor of physics at the University of Texas, and other panelists still to be named. While the chair-

Eugene H. Kone

man is busy at work assembling his group of speakers, another specialist in the subject area compiles a glossary of terms, usually with an introduction to the discipline. At the same time, the AIP Art Department designs the booklet. When the edition is run off, copies are mailed to 750 members of the National Association of Science Writers; other copies are sent to AIP Corporate Associates and officers of member societies. The remainder of the edition is kept for new science writers and others making specific requests for booklets. Thus far, about ten of these glossaries have gone to second printings.

Arrangements for the meetings are supervised by Mrs. Meyers, who sends

Dicke explains space physics

out invitations to all science writers and makes reservations for seminar and luncheon space. Other arrangements are made for a dinner of participating scientists the night before the seminar. This dinner, in the nature of a practice session, is also attended by a science writer. As each scientist discusses what he will include in his presentation, the reporter offers advice on subject matter.

Looking to the future, Kone believes the seminars will become increasingly interdisciplinary in nature. "Their subject matter will reflect the changing patterns in physics itself. At this time, the Institute is the only scientific organization in the US that, on a consistent, annual basis, holds seminars for the press. As the disciplines in science continue to merge we will seek seminar cosponsorship with other national societies."