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LETTERS

Objective editorial decisions

The letter of Mendel Sachs (PHYSICS TODAY, June, page 15) evidences a real concern for the loss of the contributions of certain individuals to physics. Although a physical journal that is established especially to provide a publication outlet for sufficiently developed new theses in physics will encourage freedom of thought in physics, I believe something can be gained within the existing framework by present journal editors. What I wish to propose is that the public physics prescribed by editorial decisions be given more freedom by making editorial decisions on a more objective basis.

My point can be made by a review of the difference in degree of anonymity of authors and reviewers. The author's name and institutional affiliation are given to the reviewer with any paper submitted to American Institute of Physics journals for publication. Such a difference tends toward control of the physics to be published through AIP by a relatively small group of physicists. I believe physicists can show their objectivity in choosing which papers should be published by the following procedure.

I suggest that all papers be transmitted to the editors in a form that allows the editor to remove the author's name and affiliation from the body of the paper. Then papers can be reviewed by the reviewer with objectivity as the reviewer does not see the author's name or institutional affiliation. The reviewer makes his recommendation, which is based purely on the form and content of the paper, to the editor who determines whether it should be published.

Perhaps once a year, each journal might devote space to listing those who served during the year as reviewers, and space might be devoted to listing the names of authors who had submitted a paper only to have it rejected. This second space would tend to keep authors feeling a sense of responsibility to their profession

and to prevent editors from being inundated with a barrage of unnecessary correspondence.

If editors of AIP journals feel that the suggestion I have given here is not a workable one, I suggest that authors be given direct contact with reviewers in the case of a rejection. This would bring the individualist into communication with the physics community in charge of public physics. Whether the final result is subjection of the individualist to the group or a revelation to the group through a discovery of the individual who works under unusual freedom, the least accomplishment is removal of decisions on public physics from the wraps of present editorial policies.

Realizing the problems editors may have in getting good reviewers and keeping friends, I should like to offer the compensation to the editor that his reviewers could be drawn from a broader list of physicists than is done, and objectivity should be at least as acceptable as editorial responsibility for the rejection of the paper of a friend.

Moody L. Coffman

Oklahoma City University

Better high-school physics

The discussions on your April editorial "Is Physics Too Tough?" perhaps are symptoms of a more insidious disease. I suspect the trouble is in the high-school physics course. But before I discuss the diagnosis, another disturbing symptom must be noted. It is regrettable that, as far as I know, college physics courses universally start from "scratch." One never assumes any knowledge of physics from high school so that some material need not be covered in the university course. Aren't we really saying that high school physics is not necessary and even that it is a waste of time? The second alternative is particularly true if the high-school course is taught in a perfunctory manner.

I suggest that the disease is that we