

The Case for Togetherness

The big accelerator will be built in Weston, Illinois. After years of debate, examination of proposals, economic considerations and site inspections, despite rumblings of dissatisfaction in congressional and scientific circles, the decision is probably final.

Many reasons argue against the choice. Some regions offer more manpower or better housing opportunities. Some have greater need for a boost to their economies or scientific egos. Many disappointed accelerator seekers can tell you what the better sites are. Perhaps Weston is not the best one.

Yet it is more reasonable to assume that it is. When any decision is hard to make, you have to accept the possibility that the decision, once made, is wrong. But the successes of democratic societies in general and of United States economy and science in particular suggest that government decisions are often right and people making them are often intelligent and conscientious.

What often matters is not the viewpoint that wins but the way it is accepted afterward. In the present complex, hot-headed world we usually know where a man stands. We peg him as left, right or center, in favor of Utah, Illinois or Long Island. What we more rarely show concern for is the breadth of his tolerance—how far away from his preference a choice can be before he refuses to endorse it. Granted that the peak of his wave function is at x , what is the Δx that tells its breadth?

Matters seem to have changed in the past generation. The left used to sit down and argue with the right; the liberals fought it out with the conservatives, and after all the drums had been beaten and the votes were counted, they went off to have just as friendly a game of golf or cards as before it all started. Nowadays it's hard to get someone at far right or far left to be friendly with anyone whose position is even a little nearer center. Republi-

cans and Democrats are splintered into little groups and Stalinists aren't speaking to Khrushchevites or even looking toward the Brezhnev-Kosygin group. Things seem to have changed, and it isn't clear whether the changes are in the world, the problems or the way of looking at them.

Perhaps one must tolerate congressmen who protract an argument beyond the point of no return. They are, after all, responsible to people at the ballot box and not to impersonal intangibles like science or world progress.

But it does not seem appropriate for scientists to fall into the same trap. Arguments and disagreements we should always have, but mainly in the house, not outside. When science speaks to other segments of society, each scientist should be eager to show his tolerance than the correctness of his position. No matter how bitterly he opposes the other fellow's argument, he should always understand and appreciate it and be able to expound it, alongside his own, to lawmakers and the public. When he can, he should keep even a congressman from wasting energy on a dead argument.

The accelerator site has been selected, and the arguments for other sites have become irrelevant. Now physicists should display tolerance, accept the decision and plan for a future physics with the new machine at work.

Decisions must be made, and experience shows us that if science will not make and ratify them within its own councils, the public will make them, and the public will enforce them if recalcitrants maintain opposition. Past history shows that when physicists are disunited, they don't get what they want. Times are tough in Washington. Any disunity among physicists will convince Congress that they don't know what funds they need or what they hope to accomplish with them. Good sense calls on us to hang together so that no one will have occasion to hang us separately.

—R. Hobart Ellis Jr