

LETTERS

Discussing the APS amendment

With this issue *PHYSICS TODAY* abandons the practice, followed in the past three months, of publishing part or all of essentially every letter written to the magazine on the proposed amendment to the constitution of the American Physical Society. The amendment has the intention of permitting the members of the society to pass resolutions on "any matter of concern to the society." Writers in great numbers have accepted the invitation, printed in the *APS Bulletin* and in *PHYSICS TODAY*, to express their feelings on whether this amendment should pass or fail.

In abandoning the practice of presenting at least some of each letter our feeling is that most arguments have been heard and most letters are repeating or emphasizing thoughts already expressed. Only when a contribution appears to be in some way unique do we plan to print letters on this subject in the future. Our pages are strictly limited and only by displacing articles or departments elsewhere can we continue to publish a large "Letters" department each month devoted exclusively to one question.

All communications that bear on the question are copied and entered into two looseleaf notebooks, one of which is kept here at the *PHYSICS TODAY* office and the other at the APS office in the same building. The table of contents starts with a letter from Charles Schwartz to the editor of *PHYSICS TODAY* last 28 May and continues through a few more than 100 items to the present. The material is available for study to anyone who wishes to peruse these books at the American Institute of Physics. Copies can be made available elsewhere to anyone who will pay the cost of duplication.

We do intend that each person be heard, at least in part. Thus we offer here the names of those persons who have written to us about the amendment but whose letters have not been previously published.

The following have written that they are in favor of the amendment: D.A.A.S. Narayana Rao, Texas Southern University; John Brunn, Chabot College.

The following have written that they are opposed:

Andrew F. Gabrysh, Irvona, Pa.; Lee M. Hecht, Chicago, Ill.; H. R. Westerman, Madison, N. J.; Gerald I. Farmer, Gaithersburg, Md.; Ronald B. Standler, U. of Denver; L. J. Gutay, Purdue U.; John D. Kleis, Fansteel Metallurgical Corporation, Chicago; Perry Pollins, Lexington, Mass.; H. Hurwitz Jr, General Electric Co., Schenectady, N. Y.; J. G. Castle Jr, U of Pittsburgh.

The following have written in favor but with stringent qualifications:

Luther Davis, Wayland, Mass.; Robert T. Bates, Richardson, Tex.; Lawrence Cranberg, U. of Virginia.

The following has written against but favors some restricted political action: Arnold F. Clark, Lawrence Radiation Laboratory, Livermore, Calif.

In addition, we have received the following opinions:

I am against the intrusion of political debate into the activities of the society, but since you have prejudged the issue by publishing political advertisements and by stating political arguments, if the matter comes to a vote, I shall have to vote for political involvement in the hope that the balance may be redressed.

J. W. ALLEN
Cambridge, England

The tradition of not mixing with politics was already broken when, for the first time, the APS president invited President Johnson for a *political speech* during the last annual APS meeting at Washington, D. C. Should we also consider these invitations more seriously from now on?

CHIA-GEE WANG
Cambridge, Mass.

We will continue this practice until the ballot is mailed. —THE EDITORS

Schwartz's rebuttal

I feel obliged to reply to some of the objections that have been raised against the proposed APS constitutional amendment in letters in this

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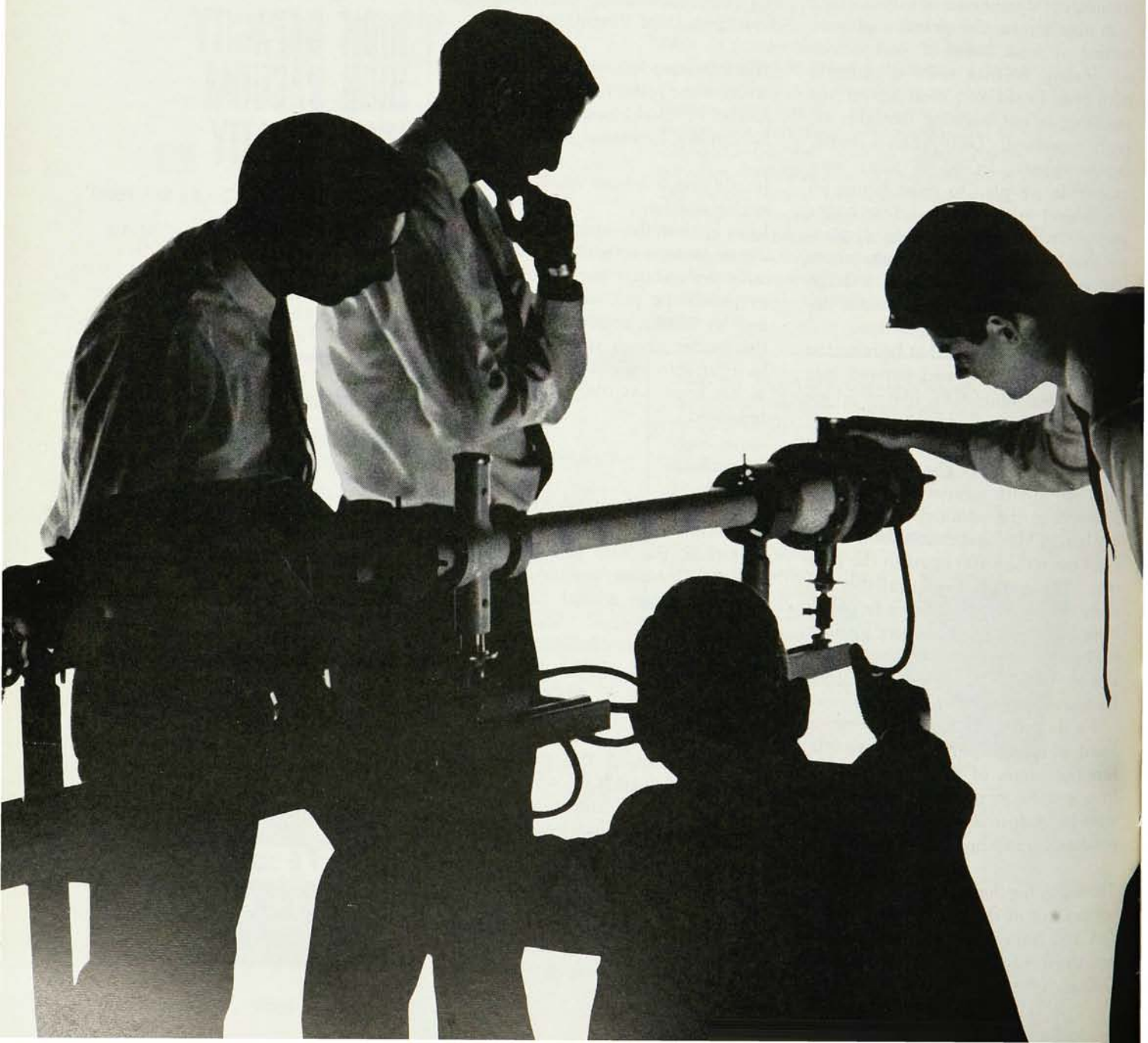
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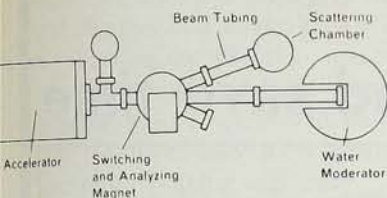
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column and in the discussion at the Chicago meeting (reported in *PHYSICS TODAY*, March, page 81). Although there have been a number of arguments of substance that the reader will evaluate for himself, it appears to me that several statements represent off-scale reactions of alarm, and these should be put back into perspective.

Chief cause of the exaggerated responses was probably the unfortunate phrasing of the announcement presented by the editors of the *Bulletin*, "Should the APS broaden its purpose and aims to include discussion of public issues?" Many readers appear to have taken this question too literally and have drawn the false conclusion that some group is trying to turn the society into a wide-open political debating club. Problems of the pursuit of physics that are entangled with questions of public policy have been and will continue to be topics for discussion at APS meetings. An outstanding example was the stimulating session at the last annual meeting, "The Coupling of Physics and Society in the Seventies," sponsored by COM-PAS, the AIP Committee on Physics and Society. The fear that such activities will grow to dominate the meetings is quite without basis; the APS council will certainly see to it that physics remains foremost.

A desire to revise the object and purpose of the society is another misrepresentation of the intent and substance of the amendment. My own expectation is that we can achieve a greater fulfillment of our stated purpose if we first disabuse ourselves of the notion that the activity of physics takes place in a vacuum without interacting strongly with the outside world. The society as a body is obliged to make judgements about whether or not particular matters of public policy impinge on "the advancement and diffusion of the knowledge of physics," and vice versa. What the proposed amendment does is to provide a mechanism whereby the membership at large can participate, when it cares to, in making these judgements. The habit has been to avoid controversial issues whatever their substance, and the one thing we do hope to change is this prudish habit.

Another element that has led to the extreme character of many letters and comments is the physicists' love of a good argument and the inclination to

let a small prejudice lead one by logical progression to the most exaggerated conclusions. What we need most precisely in this area of the overlap of science with politics is a tempered weighing of facts, opinions and probabilities. The proposed amendment has been criticized for being less than perfectly constructed, and I will apologize for this failing even though I have yet to see any concrete suggestions that might improve it. If it is agreed that greater participation by the members is desired in studying how our professional concerns intermingle with public issues, then let us adopt the proposal as at least a reasonable instrument to start with. Then we can proceed with the experiment in earnest.

CHARLES SCHWARTZ
University of California, Berkeley

Base decisions on traditions

I read with great interest the interview of Chalmers Sherwin in the September issue, together with the letters commenting on it in the December issue, especially since one finds in the pages of *PHYSICS TODAY* so few such insights into the serious political and social issues that are affecting even the internal structure of science. Indeed, I would argue, in support of Charles Schwartz's challenge to the traditional policy of the American Physical Society towards political controversy, that the Sherwin interview is a clear sign that the hands-off-politics attitude that has served so well in building our magnificent scientific structure is outdated and will only accentuate the stagnation of this structure in the next few years.

It is now clear that 1945-65 have been the fat years. One would prefer not to measure this prosperity solely in terms of rising budgets and salaries but also in terms of an increasing capacity to realize our individual and collective capabilities as scientists. Part of this prosperity has involved an alliance with the war establishment. Of course the long-term dangers of this alliance are widely recognized, and attempts have been made to build up other institutions such as the National Science Foundation. In addition a relatively small group—the "science advisory" people—have worked very hard at serving as intermediaries between science and government. They seem to be an admirable group of men, and no doubt are very capable on short-term issues, but I would sus-