

letters

his family have resided nearby in Bishop for several years. The concerns he has developed while living in and interacting with the people of the Owens Valley have caused him to apply his talents in new directions, and I personally look forward to his success and to the encouragement that would thereby be given to other physical scientists to make the attempt. This type of person is sorely needed on the Washington scene.

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Permanent job exchanges

In all of the discussions pertaining to the bleak academic employment situation, one class of unfortunate individuals seems to have been neglected. These are people who have tenure but, for one reason or another, find themselves quagmired in what they consider to be untenable dead-end positions. Perhaps such an individual has achieved a reasonable amount of success, but he finds that the only openings available now are for those in the superstar category on the one hand, and untenured openings intended for fledglings on the other. The latter predominate because of the exploitative "hireable only if fireable" policy of most universities. Frustrated in his immobilization, such a person's morale inevitably erodes, his productivity may decline, and, only if exceptionally durable, will he avoid psychosomatic illnesses, such as ulcers, and so on. Indeed, departments exist in which the majority falls in this category. And departments of this kind, outwardly resembling a collection of fossils embalmed in amber, can be seized upon by hostile administrators as paradigms of the failure of tenure.

But hark! A simple solution exists, in principle, that may save many such individuals, revitalize stagnant departments, and perhaps indirectly strengthen tenure. Although particle-hole reaction channels may now be largely closed off, exchange reactions can still occur. What I am proposing are permanent academic exchanges of tenured faculty members, tenure being conserved, of course. Since "one man's poison is another man's meat," and the "grass is greener . . ." such exchanges could be mutually satisfying. As a simple hypothetical example, A might be an isolated high-energy theorist at a department with no high-energy program. He is frustrated at having no one to talk to and no graduate students. His department has an interest in hiring a solid-state experimentalist, but is forbidden to create a new open-

ing. Somewhere, there is a solid-state experimentalist B, disgruntled by what he considers a low salary. His department chairman dislikes and would gladly dismiss him if he were untenured. Their high-energy experimental group would love to have a "house theorist" to talk to, but again, the size of the faculty has been limited. Clearly, the exchange $A \rightleftharpoons B$ might prove beneficial to all. One can envision more complex exchanges and write down all the appropriate Feynman diagrams. The possible ramifications are too numerous to discuss here.

Academic exchanges on a temporary basis are nothing new and, perhaps, can be used as a prelude, like trial marriages. What is needed, obviously is an agency to bring interested parties together, somewhat like computer dating. But the problem is more complicated if complex exchanges are considered. Such an agency should only serve the purpose of bringing together the individuals, who then would have to negotiate with their departments. In the case of exchange of physicists, the APS should consider providing such a service. In contrast to the employment registry, information should be kept confidential (unless the individual desires otherwise).

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Light flashes in the sky

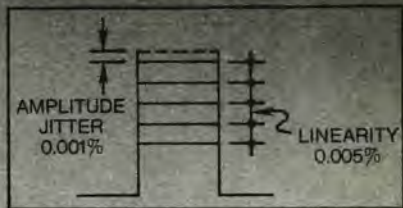
Jack Epstein suggested (March, page 15) that "some of the phenomena that have been designated as 'flying saucers' could possibly be sightings of small specks of antimatter in the process of annihilation in the earth's atmosphere." On two occasions the past year, I have observed a series of random but localized light flashes that one might attribute to annihilation process. The observations of what I call the "random flash-bulb effect" were made by continuously scanning the twilight sky with 10×35 binoculars. The color and duration of each flash was similar to that of a xenon bulb.

The explanation given by Epstein had occurred to me because no material objects could be discerned as the sources of these lights. The first observation was a series of localized light flashes in a clear, blue sky, estimated to be less than 10 miles away. Following this 3-4 second display, an off-white light "switched on" and proceeded slowly across the sky. Apparently it traveled a straight path at an altitude less than 10 000 feet. When viewed through binoculars, the latter light appeared as a single, spherical shape unattached to a material object. Assuming that the angular resolution

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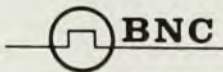


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