

letters

continued from page 15

just an ordinary citizen who happens to have belonged to The American Physical Society for 33 years, I suspect that promiscuous use of the professional cloak in speaking out on non-physics problems is "where we have failed" in the area of credibility with the public.

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8/21/78

On second reading

In my review of *Scientists Confront Velikovsky* (August, page 56), I questioned whether J. Derral Mulholland could have meant to say that the number of days per year could have varied as much as 1 or 2 percent during recorded history. Velikovsky, in fact, had proposed even more drastic changes in the Earth's rotation rate within the past 3000 years, and as I read Mulholland's discussion I assumed he was also speaking to the possibility of such variations during historical times. In fact, however, Mulholland was referring to the possibility of such changes over geological times (say, the past few hundred million years), as is clear from a careful reading of his following paragraph (page 109 of *Scientists Confront Velikovsky*). I had read too quickly and misinterpreted his meaning, and I apologize for the error.

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9/21/78

Image slicers

Nathaniel Carleton and William Hoffmann, in their interesting article on the Multiple-Mirror Telescope (September, page 30), state "However, the practical difficulties of these devices [image slicers] are such that they have seen little actual use." This is perhaps a tongue-in-cheek statement, appearing as it does in an article describing a telescope with "21 electromechanical servos", "51 interacting parameters," and at least 73 optical elements. An image slicer is a simple and practical device. Their rarity is due almost entirely to the conservatism of astronomers, combined with a folklore that leads to statements like the one quoted. Slicers were reviewed¹ a few years ago in a book edited by Carleton himself. Richardson slicers, which can be used in beams of small f -number, are in fairly wide use. For slower beams, the elegant Walraven slicer² (a solid-state equivalent of the Bowen device) can be highly recommended. I have no doubt that the "telescope slicer"^{1,3} proposed for the MMT will also work, but it is more complicated than an image slicer and will have

its own practical difficulties. I would not be surprised to see an image slicer on the telescope before long.

References

1. D. M. Hunten, in *Methods of Experimental Physics 12A, Astrophysics* (N. P. Carleton, Ed.) Academic Press, New York (1974).
2. Th. and J. H. Walraven, in *Proc. ESO/CERN Conference on Auxiliary Instrumentation for Large Telescopes* (1972), page 1975.
3. W. G. Fastie, *Appl. Opt.* **6**, 397 (1967).

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10/19/78

Boycott anti-ERA states?

In a letter published in September (page 13), Robert Rubin asks why The American Physical Society hasn't taken a position on the matter of holding meetings in states (presumably not holding meetings there) that have not ratified the Equal Rights Amendment. And he asks why there has been no discussion on this question in *PHYSICS TODAY*.

Maybe this is because there are after all still a few level heads in the leadership of the APS. But according to a recent newsletter, the Division of Particles and Fields is now considering such a position; so I can imagine that the political activists, and also those who look to Washington to solve all society's problems, have long been itching for the APS to raise its banner in this knightly effort.

I strongly oppose the APS's taking any position on such a matter as the ERA because I don't think that this issue has anything to do with the purposes for which the APS was organized. If an APS member is discriminated against then it is appropriate for the APS to express itself and to act thereon. But this is quite a different matter.

Granted the desirability of the goal of the ERA, individuals certainly differ on the appropriateness of the ERA as the proper means to achieve that goal. This is a social and political question and as such has no connection with the reasons that I, and I think most others, joined the APS. I do not think that the APS should even be commenting on such issues let alone be acting on them.

In fact I resent the zealotry of those who inject a divisive social and political issue into an organization whose purpose—the pursuit of physics—should cut across all such questions. There are ample forums for those concerned with social and political matters to pursue these concerns.

W. MOELLERING
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10/17/78

Robert Rubin asks why the APS has not taken a position on the proposed Equal Rights Amendment, yet he answers his

own question when he quotes the APS constitution that the "object of the American Physical Society is the advancement and diffusion of the knowledge of physics."

The APS has neither the obligation, the authority, nor the ability to solve all of society's problems. We should stick to our declared objective, and not dilute our efforts on unrelated issues.

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9/28/78

With reference to the letter of Robert Rubin, I would like to suggest that the function of The American Physical Society is not and has not been to take such positions as suggested by Rubin on such matters as ERA. I believe that this was clearly expressed by the membership of APS with regard to the "Schwartz Amendment" of a decade ago.

It might be of interest to recall that members of APS reside in the states who by legal process have chosen to not ratify the ERA. It may also be that members throughout our country have varying views on the wisdom of this particular amendment. To suggest that the APS consider boycott of any region of the United States because of political views of its citizens is offensive and absurd. Surely we do not wish the APS to take punitive action against members for exercising their rights as US citizens? To demand that candidates for office in the APS declare their personal political views on such matters as the ERA would raise questions about the purpose of the office.

I support the continued attention of APS to professional matters, to quality publication and dissemination of the advances in physics, and to public education on concerns of the physics profession. Let us tend to physics as a Society and leave the emotional, political issues to the individual.

BENNY J. HILL
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9/28/78

Managing research

The series of letters on these pages (February, page 83; September, page 11) discussing management practices for research organizations raises several interesting questions. Management, whether a science or an art, is necessary for the smooth functioning of any organization. Fair and efficient application of the principle of accountability is at the core of any managerial system. This holds true both for the loose application of a traditional academic department as well as for the type of controls necessary in meeting a very specific design requirement.