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letters

Rewards for referees?

The exchange of letters between Mark Azbel and Robert Adair (October, page 96) indicates that the editors of "Letters" journals have difficulty in persuading referees to provide prompt and thorough reports on papers submitted. As Adair points out, American journals cannot use the kinds of pressures available in Russia, and offering a cash payment big enough to make any difference would be prohibitively expensive.

May I suggest that an effective incentive would be to pay referees in a currency they probably consider even more precious than money: rapid publication of their own papers. When a referee (who is presumably a reputable scientist doing research that might be published in the same journal) has turned in, say, three satisfactory reports within the specified time limit, the reward would be the right to publish one paper without any refereeing at all, subject only to meeting the usual standards of format, length and appropriateness of content as judged by the editor.

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10/19/79
THE EDITOR OF PRL COMMENTS: In the course of responding to the specific comments of Mark Azbel and others, we may have left the incorrect impression that our referees are typically dilatory and irresponsible. This is not the case: most of our referees respond promptly with carefully written reports. It is true that we do receive some late reports and some very poor reports, but these delinquencies lead to only a portion of the faults attributed to the journal.

In an imperfect world, we are not categorically against bribing men to do their duty; but, if a bribe is required—and we do not believe that is the case—we would hope to find a less meretricious reward.

ROBERT K. ADAIR
Editor
Physical Review Letters

Developing nation debate

I find Michael Moravcsik's reply to E. J. Ansaldo (September, page 102) unsatisfying. The position that Moravcsik takes in leaving the export of science and

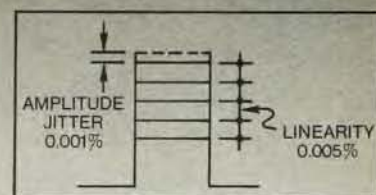
technology up to the developing nations contains a crucial flaw with respect to the proliferation of nuclear materials. Part of the worldwide problem that now exists in this regard is a direct result of leaving the matter up to the developing nations. It is now a matter of fact that a great international insecurity exists as a result of distributing too freely (or at all) to the developing nations some of the most poisonous substances in the universe—ostensibly for their peaceful use. The experience in India and lately Pakistan comes to mind, with the former's detonation of atomic devices and the latter's plans to do alike.

Amory Lovins makes it quite clear in his book *Soft Energy Paths* that the nuclear leaders should lead, not follow, with respect to both peaceful and other uses of radioactive materials. He suggests that the US immediately terminate all peaceful nuclear development as an example to others. I suspect that Lovin's proposal may be one of our few sane leadership options if we wish to avoid turning the world into an armed camp.

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THE AUTHOR COMMENTS: I generally hesitate to answer statements that claim to represent the "sane" side of controversy, not because I am reluctant to appear to have labeled myself "insane," but rather because such statements generally spring from a degree of intolerance toward other views that makes rational discussion impossible. I therefore will restrict this reply to three very brief statements expressing my beliefs relevant to the issue. I do not say, however, either explicitly or by implication, that people holding different beliefs are less sane than I am.

► I do not believe that it is either right or feasible for the now developed countries to make science policy decisions for the now developing countries either in general or with respect to specific issues such as the use of nuclear technology.

► I do not believe that a withholding of nuclear technology from the developing countries, or the halt in the developed countries of the further development of such technology, would be successful in limiting such technology to the now developed countries. On the contrary, I believe that eventually all countries would

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