

letters

ing computer models while ensconced in the safe environment of a "center" in a developed country . . ." He can check this by studying the recommendations to the American and Nigerian governments that emerged from the workshop on "Technological Development in Nigeria," which was held at City College last April and to which I made reference in my Guest Comment. A member of the National Advisory Committee and a key participant in this workshop was Eichholz's own colleague, Ross Hammond, Director of the Engineering Experimental Station, who clearly believes in "rolling-up one's sleeves" to get a job done. (A copy of the Proceedings of this workshop can be obtained from City College.)

Finally, I also do not think that "there are global solutions to global problems." Why else would I argue for a university institute cooperating with the private sector and government that would "deal with the complexity of technology transfer to a larger developing country like Nigeria" and "would attempt to understand the impact of technology transfer on the economic, social and ecological conditions of the country into which it is introduced."

ROBERT E. MARSHAK
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3/10/80

Physique of physicists

J. S. Garrow (Brit. Med. J. 2, 1171, 1979) shows that a physique that is associated with longevity is given by a value of W/H^2 in the range of 20 to 25 for men and 19 to 25 for women, where W = mass in kg and H = height in m. He argues persuasively that overweight is a cause of excess mortality.

It would be interesting to know $\langle W/H^2 \rangle$ for physicists. Marathon runners have W/H^2 about 20.

L. S. FINEGOLD
A Fat Physicist
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3/4/80

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Scholarly communications

I enjoyed your February editorial, (page 112) on the report of the National Enquiry into Scholarly Communication, but I think the report is limited by the same institutional, as opposed to technical, barriers that are delaying the end of printed newspapers.

Advertising, for example.

However, I have been predicting for some time that the owners of cable-television systems will suddenly realize they have all the hardware needed to

publish continually updated news with, of course, the customer's ability to print out anything he wants to put in his scrapbook.

I suspect the same thing will happen to scientific literature now that all universities have large computer capability, and almost overnight the printed journals will disappear. When a writer discovers his paper can reach around the world months before a printed journal, he will probably opt for electrical publication.

I realize the institutional problems, copyright for another, are immense, but all it will take is for a major university to put a few important papers in a widely bought data bank for the steamroller to begin crunching printed journals to death.

HENRY F. DAVIDSON
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2/26/80

International language

The advocacy of Esperanto as a language for international communication by Bruce Sherwood (July, page 9) and André Heck (January, page 102) represents a concern shared by many scientists. Even those of us who were required to learn foreign languages in high school and college (either as undergraduate or graduate students), usually find that while we can work out the meaning of an article in a language other than English, the process always involves more or less discomfort. Nevertheless, I, and probably many others, share a disinclination to make the effort to learn Esperanto for communication purposes since relatively little scientific material of importance seems to be written in it.

We do indeed need an international language for reading, writing and speaking, so may I propose an alternative, one which seems to me to have manifest merit? Why don't we take advantage of the international language that has been taught and is still being taught not only in our colleges and universities, but even in many of the high schools of our country—and probably in similar schools around the world? Since suitable books for the study of this language are readily available, not to mention a tremendous amount of high-quality reading material in both book and article form, self-study is feasible. Actually, quite a large number of people in science already have limited competency in this language, and the beginner is helped by the many English cognates.

I refer, of course to Latin. For many centuries it was the common language of all scholars. It is the language in which some of the greatest books in Physics were written—Newton's *Prin-*

cipia . . ., for example—and for many years was the chosen language for scientific articles, until nationalistic jingoism displaced it. A paper by Gauss in 1832 was, I think, the last notable scientific paper to be written in Latin. Could we, perhaps, turn back the clock a century and a half and get back to more efficient communication system, one of proven merit?

E. SCOTT BARR
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1/25/80

National library

The editorial of Harold L. Davis, "Time for a National Library" (February, page 112) presented some misinformation. His statement that a national library was first proposed in 1899 overlooks the earlier proposal by Charles Coffin Jewett in 1848. Jewett, who was the first librarian of the Smithsonian Institution, saw a need for scientific and technical information as a resource in promoting American growth.

Davis asks the question: "... why don't the libraries agree to share one copy of each book or periodical that would be stored at a central location?" The answer is: As early as the last quarter of the 19th century the Library of Congress had formed a bibliographic network with the then-existing large public and academic libraries. In effect, the Library of Congress has available the card catalogues of all the major libraries of the nation. Today regional library networks are located throughout the country.

At first the idea of a central depository seems eminently practical and logical. Researchers, however, are not prepared to wait for needed materials for times on the order of days or weeks. Currently, inter-library loan among academic libraries averages three weeks. The slowdown incurred by inter-library loan relative to home-library access time would seriously impede the rate at which reference and background research could be done. The move to a centralized depository system on a national level undoubtedly implies that paperwork alone would increase the delay of document delivery.

To speed information retrieval, Davis suggests the computer-based information-storage systems as a vehicle for the researcher to leisurely locate pertinent information. Currently all data bases are owned by commercial vendors. The connect-time and document delivery are expensive. Virtually all of the intricate searches (including key-word usage, search strategies, search span in both time and number of documents) are performed by an intermediary, not the researcher himself. Additionally,