

# letters

## Unions invade the campus

The National Task Force on Education for Economic Growth, echoing the National Commission on Excellence in Education, states that "success as a nation will depend on our ability to improve education and training for millions of individuals." Attention is directed mainly to public schools, and no comparable note of alarm is sounded concerning higher education in colleges and universities.

More specifically, the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Federal Education Policy stresses that education unions bear some responsibility for the failure of the nation's public schools. The Task Force argues that collective bargaining of teachers' unions and associations has resulted in "protection of the weakest teachers rather than winning rewards for the strongest." The growth of these unions over the last 15 years—2 million of the nation's 2.2 million schoolteachers now belong to unions—coincides with the decline in the Scholastic Aptitude Test scores and also in the standards of science and mathematics taught in schools. Unions naturally represent majority interests, and outstanding individuals, particularly in science and mathematics, tend to be discouraged and enticed out of the educational system. All this is not surprising.

A disturbing new feature on the education horizon is the intrusion of unions into institutions of higher learning. The intrusion is picking up pace and amounts to an invasion. Many faculty members of colleges and universities, blissfully unaware of what is happening, are in for a great surprise. Experience at the University of Massachusetts<sup>1</sup> in the last six years indicates that the invasion is of particular significance for the natural sciences.

Let me point out that in general I am not hostile to unions. The union movement, in modern form, can be traced back to the 18th century, and its development parallels the growth in emphasis on human rights. The movement succeeded in securing improved living standards and in humanizing the workplace. In any industry, where a gulf separates labor from management, a union acts as a mediating level of

administration advantageous to all involved. Within some industries and many professions, the gulf has tended to vanish during this century, and trouble begins when a union seeks to create and widen a gulf to justify its existence.

Academic freedom, in modern form, also dates back to the 18th century. The right of scholars to teach and do research without fear of consequence triumphed over interference by state and church. Tenure of appointment has since become the means of securing and reinforcing academic freedom. It is generally accepted that a dedicated and conscientious faculty is the heart of any institution of higher learning, and this still holds true despite the rapid growth in recent years of academic bureaucracy. Wherever faculty governance and participation remain crucial, no distinguishable gulf exists between what might be termed management and labor.

But trouble begins when a university falls prey to authoritarian and arbitrary administration, particularly in times of financial stringency. Such was the fate of the University of Massachusetts, where the faculty, demoralized by maladministration and financial deprivation, formed a faculty-librarian union in 1977. A rift occurred into which intruded an opportunist union with state and national affiliations. (The title of the faculty union is *Massachusetts Society of Professors/Faculty Staff Union/Massachusetts Teachers Association/National Education Association*.) The union has since endeavored to widen this rift with an aggressive rhetoric and its philosophy of adversary relations. It has created an additional layer of administration that under more salubrious conditions would be quite unnecessary. Significantly, most support for the faculty-librarian union comes from librarians (having no teaching duties), the faculties of the colleges of Humanities and Fine Arts, the Social and Behavioral Sciences and the school of Education whose members desire job security and the abatement of salary differentials vis-à-vis the faculties of the colleges of Natural Sciences and Mathematics,

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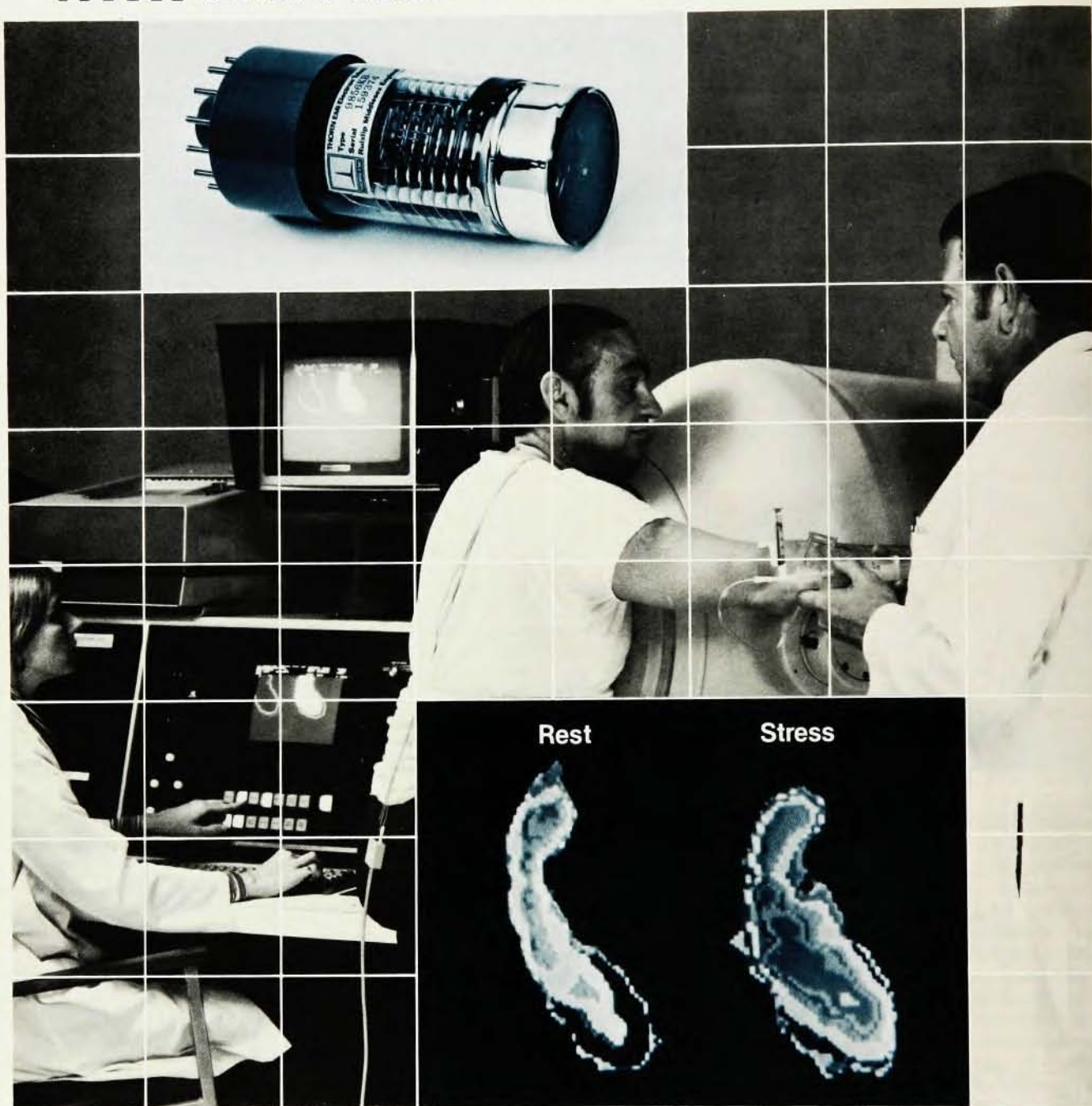
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## letters

Food and Natural Resources and the school of Engineering. The union has exploited and widened this two-culture gap.

The contract negotiated on behalf of the University by administration and union officials contains a provision for the draconian measure of firing tenured professors who refuse to pay homage to the union with financial support in the form of either membership dues or agency fees. The contract, backed by state law, overrides faculty tenure. Many faculty members (now dubbed "bargaining unit members") are naturally alarmed at the undermining of tenure that traditionally safeguards academic freedom.

Faculty members having a grievance must now grieve through the union. In certain cases, administrators obtain clearance from the union before engaging in discussions on certain issues with faculty members. Indeed, many senior administrators recruited in recent years prefer the bargaining method and favor short-circuiting collegial collaboration. From the point of view of many faculty members, it now seems there is little difference between the administration and union officials.

Hundreds of menacing letters from union officials are periodically sent by registered mail to the home addresses of faculty members who resist paying an agency fee to the union. These hostile communications have one message: pay up or be fired. One can imagine their effect on spouses and families. Less frequent, but no less intimidating, are similar letters by registered mail or hand-delivered from the president's office in Boston.

On 10 March, David Knapp, president of the University, in a letter to eleven members of the faculty on the Amherst campus, issued an ultimatum: pay homage to the union in specified ways, or be suspended without salary for one week. Of the eleven, ten are scientists and engineers, and the eleventh is a philosopher and an ex-dean of the Graduate School. The ultimatum went into effect a week later, and four faculty members were suspended without salary. Previous to the ultimatum, no administrator sought to hold discussions with the threatened members to determine what was at issue. (The threatened faculty members were: Vere Chappell, Philosophy; Hugh Davis, Environmental Sciences, suspended; Edward Harrison, Physics and Astronomy, suspended; Bruce Jacobson, Biochemistry; Douglas Jensen, Physics and Astronomy, suspended; Robert Kent, Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning; Michael Kreisler, Physics and Astronomy; Alan Marra, Wood Science and Techno-

logy, suspended; John Palmer, Zoology; William Randall, Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning; and John Rhodes, Geology and Geography.)

As a direct result of the union, an ominous precedent has occurred and tenure is now without substantive meaning. Oddly enough, tenure still protects the incompetent, lazy and morally reprehensible, all of whom have the right to appeal to the union for support and enjoy the benefit of salary during the process of arbitration. But tenure fails to protect those who dissent against the union in the cause of academic freedom; they are pilloried by the administration and suspended without salary and benefit of arbitration.

This apparently is a foretaste of what presumably will happen elsewhere in other institutions when they also succumb to the union invasion. Union contributions by the faculty of this University, I regret to say, are financing the invasion of other campuses.

One can only speculate on the impact of the unions on the standards and morale of higher education. The possible consequences are alarming. The heady atmosphere of free ideas and challenging thought, essential in the excitement of research and advanced learning, will undoubtedly suffer in a climate of intimidation and compliance. In my view, the education unions spell the death of universities. Two worthy traditions—academic freedom and the union movement—come into conflict, bringing extinction to the former and shame to the latter.

We read in such journals as *Science* and *Nature* letters from colleagues in other countries whose academic freedom is curtailed and scholarly careers ruined by inimical forces and political interests. We tend to think that similar things cannot happen in this country. Yet we must be on our guard, even here, against the activities of private institutions that seek to subvert universities and colleges to their own profit and interest. How can we champion the cause of persecuted scholars overseas when the finger now points at the University of Massachusetts?

Edward Kelley, a labor lawyer and vice-president of the University, and Bruce Laurie, professor of history and ex-president of the union, state in the *Collegian*, the Amherst Campus newspaper, that those of the "Amherst Eleven" who publicly protest the punitive action taken by union-administration officials, tarnish the reputation of the University. But the damage is already done by their own corrosive acts. What remains is loyalty to the cause of academic freedom and concern for the fate of higher education in general.

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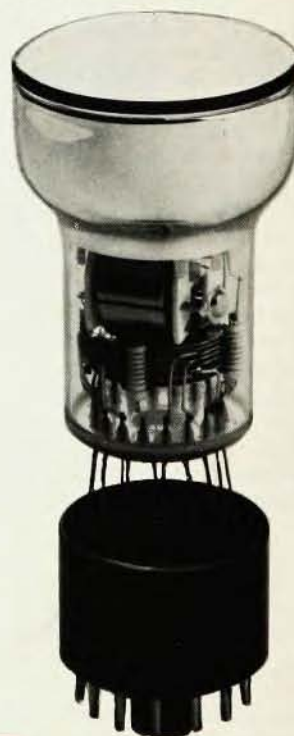
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## letters

Judging by events at this University, there remains little doubt that union representations and collective bargaining operate in the interests of the majority, favoring the preservation and growth of academic mediocrity. As the acid erodes, principles of integrity and distinguished scholarship must inevitably suffer or flee elsewhere. According to the current union model, installed at this University, it seems clear that scientists will be the principal victims.

Unless we have the courage and foresight to fight for academic freedom, what has happened already in the public schools will undoubtedly become widespread in colleges and universities. The loss will be tragic and the nation will suffer irreversible harm.

EDWARD R. HARRISON  
University of Massachusetts  
Amherst, Massachusetts

## References

1. J. Walsh, *Science* **220**, 1026 (1983). E. R. Harrison, "Threat to Academic Freedom," *Chronicle for Higher Education*, 1 June 1983.

## Help for general meetings

In his retiring address as president of APS (April, page 35), Maurice Goldhaber laments the decline in attendance at APS general scientific meetings while noting that specialized meetings have increased in attendance. He goes on to deplore "the tendency to fragmentation that this reflects, because a good deal of the strength of a scientist comes from being not just a specialist but also a generalist." At the risk of seeming old-fashioned, I concur with this sentiment; I would therefore like to offer the following suggestion, which might perhaps encourage increased attendance at the general meetings.

Each year, at one of the large APS meetings (New York or Washington), there might be a special session devoted to "The State of Physics," where the major developments in the field during the preceding 12 months are summarized and presented in a way to appeal to the nonspecialist, as in a typical physics-department colloquium. More specifically, the session could consist of four invited talks with the speakers being the chairmen of the respective APS divisions whose research highlights are being summarized. Each year, a different group of four divisions (out of the eleven APS divisions) could be represented. In their state of physics addresses, the speakers might also outline near-future goals in their fields to look forward to as a result of the

recent developments presented.

This innovation to enhance our physics world-view would likely increase attendance at the general APS meeting by at least one specialist, with my presence.

MORRIS PRIPSTEIN  
Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory  
Berkeley, California

9/83

## More on weight

The letter from Francis Throw (July, page 98) contains a sentence to which I would like to respond. The sentence concerns usage of the word "weight," and is, "After all, the word had already been current for centuries before Newton said ' $F = ma$ .' That reminded me of a limerick I wrote twenty years ago, so here it is:

I wrote that it was a great day  
When Newton said, " $F$  is  $ma$ ."  
Alas, he did not;  
He said, " $F$  is  $p$ -dot"  
And my doctorate drifted away.

Other than that, I agree with the writer's suggestions, and wish him well.

JOSEF G. SOLOMON  
Roosevelt, New Jersey

9/83

## Let 100 flowers bloom

"Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely." Yet we in the "rigorous" sciences routinely lay enormous burdens of power on editors and referees of our journals.

Consider the anonymous referee. We all know horror stories, fact or fiction, about how that position can be abused. I like this one, more fact than fiction, which shows how things can go awry even if all persons behave in a manner to satisfy Diogenes himself.

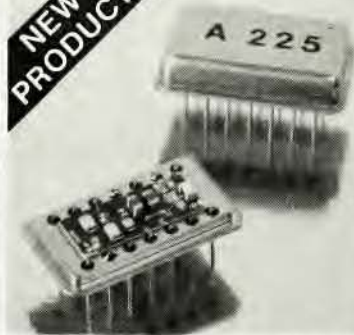
Referee A says: "Reject this article; the results are wrong." Referee B says: "Reject this article; the results are not new." Impeccably inscrutable editor transmits this melange to author. Author suspects superposition of A and B is at best incoherent and at worst tends to cancel rather than add. But she can't make the experiment; she has no coordinates for A and B. Editor ignores suggestion that he could do the experiment and says "Look, these guys are experts (your peers!). Surely you don't ask me to challenge them when they're unanimous!"

But arguments for anonymity are strong, too; no one expects established journals to tinker much with the status

*continued on page 109*

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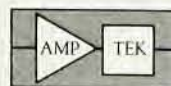
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