

letters

students in mathematics texts. Algorithms that will never be used, topics in number theory that waste the student's time and number lines that serve no useful purpose are some of the things my physics education has taught me to eliminate from the year's course. Students have only so much math time, and so it is valuable to implement a pragmatic approach to mathematics topics—if it is useful in physics or in life, it is worth presenting. Many of my fellow mathematics teachers have no physics or science background and simply present topics as they occur in the mathematics texts without any real understanding of their usefulness. Also, my physics education allows me to present topics in terms of the mathematical interpretation of nature—orbital of planets as circles, the prediction of the future using formulas, and algebra used in all manner of physical events—to show what use mathematics has to students of all levels, excellent to poor. It is my opinion that there is a great need for people who have physics backgrounds in mathematics teaching at all levels.

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6/85

Aiding Latin America

In mid 1984 the US National Science Foundation awarded a \$300 000 grant to aid Latin American physics to The American Physical Society; principal investigators are Leo Falicov (University of California at Berkeley) and Leon Lederman (Fermilab). The grant was in response to an appeal formulated during the Second Symposium on Pan American Collaboration in Experimental Physics, held in Rio de Janeiro in July and August 1983. This appeal was stimulated by financial crises resulting in severe restrictions on hard currency in many Latin American countries, which adversely affected their physicists. APS set up a grant-oversight committee with close connections to its International Physics Group, and Fermilab was designated to administer the grant. The funds were to be used for physics in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Venezuela in four areas: library subscriptions to US scientific journals; payment of page charges for articles by Latin American authors in refereed US journals; spare parts and maintenance items for existing equipment in Latin American physics laboratories; and per diem support for short visits by Latin American physicists to the United States.

Representatives in each of the five countries were selected to ascertain the



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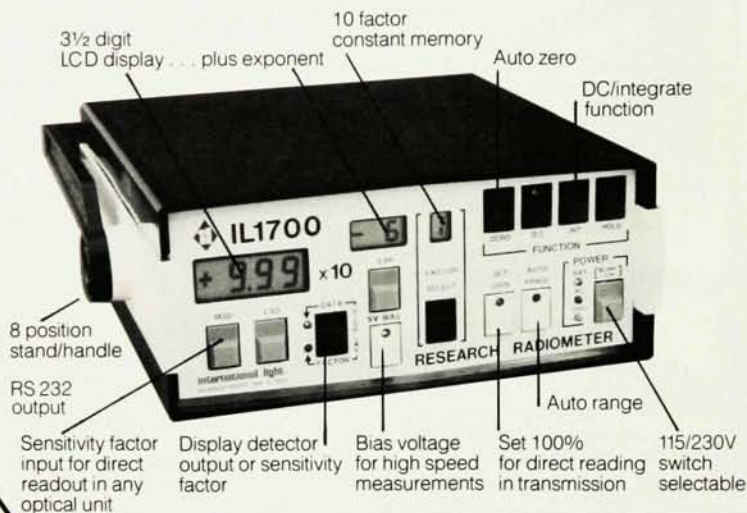
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most critical needs of their countries and to prepare lists of approved items. After some trial and error, procedures evolved for processing the requests and making appropriate payments, and the operation is now proceeding smoothly. Most difficulties have been associated with equipment purchases, including arranging for vendors to ship goods directly to Latin America and understanding customs procedures in the receiving countries. The services of Fermilab's purchasing and accounting departments—administrative and secretarial assistance, computerized record keeping and telephone calls—are provided to the grant at no cost. To date, almost two-thirds of the funds have been disbursed in the following proportions: journal subscriptions, 25%; page charges, 15%; equipment, 45%; per diem, 15%.

Much has been learned from administering this grant over the past year; perhaps the most obvious point is that distributing \$300 000 in a fair, and auditable, way involves a nonnegligible amount of effort! However, the feedback from the recipient countries convinces us that this effort has been extremely worthwhile, enabling their physics institutions to receive equipment and journals that they could not otherwise obtain, due to the unavailability of foreign currency. Such items are crucial if these researchers are to continue to produce high-quality physics. Because other people may be involved in, or contemplating, activities of a nature similar to those described here, the knowledge we have gained could be of wider interest. More information on our experiences so far is available from me at Fermilab, P.O. Box 500, Batavia, IL 60510.

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Forum on Physics and Society

It has been several years since the Forum on Physics and Society of the The American Physical Society has made a progress report on its activities to the physics community. As the past, present and future chairs of the Forum, we would like to inform you of our current activities and guidelines.

The Forum on Physics and Society was formed in 1971 in response to the growing interest among APS members in the broad issues of physics and society. Membership in the Forum is open to all APS members; today the Forum's membership of 4000 ties it for

second place among APS divisions.

The Forum's primary role is educational. From the beginning its most visible activities have been the sessions at APS meetings. Several Forum-sponsored sessions are held at almost every national meeting. Forum sessions are often held in the evenings, and standing-room-only crowds are not unusual. In recent years weapons policy and arms control have been the single area of greatest Forum activity. Sessions have described and debated such topics as the MX missile, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the SALT Treaty and new weapons systems. Other areas of Forum interest include energy, environmental issues, human rights and government restriction of scientific exchanges. Several sessions have been cosponsored with the AAPT and the APS committees on education, on opportunities in physics and on international freedom of scientists. The Forum also publishes a newsletter, *Physics and Society*, which is distributed to all Forum members and many physics libraries; the editor, John Dowling, will consider timely, brief articles for publication. One early Forum project was the highly successful Science Congressional Fellow Program, begun jointly by APS and AAAS and now expanded to 20 professional societies. The Forum also played an active part in organizing the well-known APS technical study on efficient uses of energy in 1974.

The Forum does not shrink from addressing topics that are controversial or that have a political component. In these instances it strives to ensure that the presentations span the spectrum of views on the issues. Last year the Forum sponsored nine sessions at APS meetings. Two dealt with the Strategic Defense Initiative. Key individuals presented a broad spectrum of views of the program. Among the speakers were some of the leaders from the Fletcher report, which launched SDI: Edward Gerry (Shafer Associates), chairman of the Systems Concepts Panel; Walter Soeey (Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory), member of the Countermeasures and Tactics Panel; and Gerold Yonas (SDI, DOD), chairman of the Directed Energy Weapons Panel and now chief science adviser to General James A. Abrahamson, the director of SDI. Those who spoke against "Star Wars" were Kurt Gottfried (Cornell), codirector of the Union of Concerned Scientists study on space-based missile defense; Kosta Tsipis, codirector of the Program for Science and Technology for International Security at MIT and an early author on space-based weapons; and Spurgeon Keeny, former deputy director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and currently executive director of

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