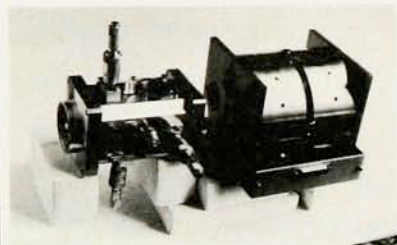


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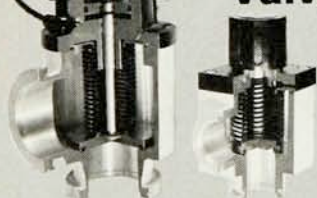


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In conclusion, I urge my critics to remember that the universe is, as the biologist J.B.S. Haldane said, not only queerer than we suppose but queerer than we *can* suppose. There is no illusion more dangerous than the belief that the progress of science is predictable. If you look for nature's secrets in only one direction, you are likely to miss the most important secrets—those that you did not have enough imagination to predict.

FREEMAN DYSON

Institute for Advanced Study

Princeton, New Jersey

4/88

SSC: Opinion Splitter

One of the many considerations in a decision about the proposed Superconducting Super Collider project should be the extent to which physicists favor this project. The physics community in the United States is well represented by the membership of The American Physical Society. Unfortunately this society has no mechanism for polling its membership on an issue.

I therefore undertook such a poll myself. Because I had to rely on my own personal resources, the sample had to be modest. It was selected on the basis of a pattern of location in the directory of The American Physical Society. The questionnaire was sent to 247 names.

The letter included a brief explanation of the poll, a slip to be returned with the vote, and an addressed but unstamped return envelope. The slip to be returned contained the following text:

"Return this portion in the attached addressed envelope.

"In view of the circumstances as I perceive them, I am/am not (cross out one) in favor of the construction of the Superconducting Super Collider as projected in the present plans submitted to Congress."

The forging of ballots was guarded against in two ways. The return envelope was addressed with a rubber stamp, the forging of which would be difficult. In addition, the return slip was embossed with a personal "ex libris" embosser, the forging of which would also be difficult. A cursory inspection of the returns indicated no cause for anxiety about forging.

By the deadline of 5 February 1988 (six weeks after the original letters were mailed), 26 original letters had been returned to me as undeliverable and unforwardable. Thus 221 ballots presumably reached the addressees.

Of these, an astounding 109 re-

sponded. Such a 49% return, with only one mailing and no return-paid provisions, appears to indicate that the issue is of interest to physicists.

Of the 109 responses, 2 were illegal in that the addressed return envelope did not accompany the ballot, in spite of the underlined request. Of the 107 valid ballots, 59 (55%) were in favor of construction, 45 (42%) were opposed and 3 (3%) were undecided.

Of those 107 ballots, 87 came with US postmarks and 20 with foreign postmarks, the latter presumably from foreign members of The American Physical Society.

Among the 87 domestic returns, 46 (53%) were in favor of construction, 39 (45%) against and 2 (2%) undecided. Correspondingly, among the foreign respondents, 13 (65%) were in favor, 6 (30%) against and 1 (5%) undecided.

Considering the modest size of the sample, one can conclude that the community of physicists, as represented by the membership of The American Physical Society, is about evenly divided on the issue of the construction of the SSC.

Insofar as the SSC issue affects all scientists in the United States, it would be of interest also to have a similar poll of scientists outside physics.

MICHAEL J. MORAVCSIK

University of Oregon

Eugene, Oregon

4/88

Remembering Richard Feynman

Thank you for publishing Richard Feynman's article on his "inside view of the Challenger inquiry" (February, page 26) when you did. I realize that it was only by a quirk of fate that its appearance coincided so closely with his passing. Still, you could not possibly have printed a better epitaph if you had tried. The article embodied the essence of Feynman's character that made him a physicist's physicist. He is sorely missed.

ROBERT J. BARKER

Air Force Office of Scientific Research

2/88

Washington, DC

What Washington, DC, needs is for an army of Feynmans to descend and start investigating everything in sight. What Richard Feynman had to say about NASA could be said about a lot of organizations, including the many faltering private-sector companies in the US that once were global leaders. When the leadership starts listening only to those who tell it what it wants to hear, decline is