

FREE EXCHANGE ON GREEN BANK VS MAX PLANCK

I read with some amazement the statement by Bernard Burke of MIT quoted in the April 1989 PHYSICS TODAY (page 56): "In fact as an observing complex [the 140-foot and 300-foot telescopes in Green Bank, West Virginia, were] scientifically superior in many respects to the Effelsberg (Bonn) observatory despite the fact that radioastronomers there have a modern 100-meter radiotelescope. People came from Bonn to use the Green Bank facilities."

In response to this, I would comment that over the past ten years, more than 20% of the observing time on the 100-m telescope went to American observers. In fact the majority of very-long-baseline interferometry proposals specifically require the use of the 100-m telescope as part of the network.

International free exchange of observing time on ground-based telescopes is an essential part of astronomy. To quote one half of the truth as an argument for the scientific superiority of the National Radio Astronomy Observatory or of American radioastronomy—whatever the motives are—is not only highly unfair but could turn out to be detrimental to the system of free exchange of observing time. My immediate reaction after I heard of the collapse of the 300-foot telescope was neither a sigh of relief nor a sentiment of *Schadenfreude*: I picked up the phone and offered the director of NRAO the support of the Max Planck Institute for Radioastronomy to help American astronomers get over this critical period until a replacement for the 300-foot telescope is in sight.

International cooperation is too important to the long-range goals of science to jeopardize it by statements aimed at day-to-day politics.

P. G. MEZGER
Max Planck Institute
for Radioastronomy
Bonn, FRG

5/89

BURKE REPLIES: It was certainly not my intent to be unfair to the Max Planck Institute for Radioastronomy

in my comments, although I can understand P. G. Mezger's protest. I regret any implication of unfairness on my part.

I certainly agree with Mezger that the 100-meter telescope is an essential part of most VLBI programs, my own included. The superior aspects of Green Bank that I had in mind were frequency coverage, superb receivers and the freedom from man-made interference that Green Bank enjoys. The flexibility of having two large instruments, one especially well suited to survey work, was another significant advantage, and is now lost.

Fortunately, a successor instrument in the 100-meter class will be built at Green Bank. The Effelsberg-Green Bank combination, together with several of the other large parabolics in the world, will give powerful new possibilities for weak-source VLBI, and many of us look forward to future collaboration.

BERNARD F. BURKE
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
10/89 Cambridge, Massachusetts

Radon: Paradigms and Precipitation

Anthony Nero's contribution "Earth, Air, Radon and Home" (April 1989, page 32) is a fine summary of the tremendous progress that has been made in this field during this decade and of the problems remaining. Since leaving the field a few years ago, I have been struck by the extent to which advances were correlated with a "paradigm shift": About 1980-82, building scientists and geologists with their approaches supplanted health physicists in this area. The health physicists had developed measurement tools and inventoried materials as sources. The geologists built on the serendipitous discovery of predominant external sources, and the building scientists examined the mechanisms of radon introduction from the soil.

I believe that this change began when Andreas George of the Depart-

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