

on hiring and termination of American scientists. I feel sorry for those poor bright American scientists and students who have spent time, money and effort to become outstanding professionals, only to find out that no one is willing to hire them. Few of these scientists even know what Congress was busy doing to them last fall.

Scientists need to support such groups as the Young Scientists' Network to protect their employment rights! By the way, Dr. Aylesworth, America's scientists are retraining out of the sciences and into secondary education and law. Perhaps they also ought to run for political office in the US House or Senate. The salaries are great; you are employed for 2–6 years at a time; and you get lots of staff to do your work for you. With fewer lawyers and career politicians in office, perhaps more funding could be spent on research and development programs and on working with business to develop tax incentives for in-house research by private industry.

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CLAERBOUT REPLIES: I cannot speak on behalf of all 25 companies that sent representatives to our job fair to recruit students with MS and PhD degrees in geophysics, but I do know that some of those companies offered jobs that were accepted by some of our students. Several of the recruiters did express to me their concern that so few of our graduates are American citizens. Our problem is that despite the availability of fine fellowships and good employment prospects, we receive few applications from qualified American students.

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7/91

Young Faculty's Plight, Older Faculty's 'Shame'

The article on the difficulties young university researchers face in obtaining funding and surviving in the academic physics community (February 1991, page 37) marks at least the 20th year of similar reporting in *PHYSICS TODAY*. A logical conclusion after all this time is that a decent-sized senior-level university constituency likes or at least doesn't mind the current overall system.

A production rate of PhDs that far exceeds steady state is guaranteed by the practice of having at least several graduate students study with each professor. Most of these PhD reci-

pients envision a teaching career, and many will give this course a try, regardless of salary or working conditions. And with an oversupply of willing participants, the university accommodates by maintaining an oversupply of faculty positions compared with an equilibrium case where positions are in balance with funding and other opportunities—hence the scramble for funding.

For years now the senior academic community has said "Tis a shame" regarding the situation. Then why does the production rate continue? Is it the pleasure of lecturing to large classes on esoteric subjects, the idea that at your retirement dinner it will be said that your name appears on hundreds of papers—mostly drafted by others—or a sense of worth from propagating knowledge on one's narrow interests? For many the rationale is a feeling that this approach is the only one that will assure adequate cream to reach the top, regardless of broader losses to society and the individual.

There is something senior faculty can do beyond saying "Tis a shame." You could advise your students of the probability of success in the academic community—you could advise them to get a parallel degree in engineering—you could advise them to marry someone rich. Any and all of these approaches are better than simply saying "Tis a shame" over another story in *PHYSICS TODAY*.

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3/91

ELF Effects: Paradigm Shift or Fabric Rip?

I was surprised to see *Currents of Death*, by Paul Brodeur, and *Cross Currents*, by Robert Becker, reviewed by Indira Nair in *PHYSICS TODAY* (December 1990, page 70). In my library those books sit next to the works of Immanuel Velikovsky, J. B. Rhine and the latest on flying saucers.

Becker, an MD schooled in physics, he says, by one elementary college course, attributes all the ills of mankind—from AIDS through depression on to zymosis—to the minute electromagnetic fields in our environment. Similar views are expressed by Brodeur, whose science education seems to be even less extensive. Nair, whose accomplishments in science I consider no greater than Brodeur's, takes much the same line, praising the books of Becker and Brodeur by faint damnation.

In the course of presenting her own version of the Becker–Brodeur thesis, Nair wildly misstates the reasons why good scientists hold these very weak 60-Hz fields harmless. In fact, such fields are considered harmless because their effects on the cellular level are very, very much smaller than kT and thermal noise. And over larger regions, the fields are very, very much smaller than other, indigenous noise fields in the body.

No one has been able to reproduce the "cellular level" experiments that Nair claims have demonstrated the existence of biological effects of such weak fields. The epidemiological studies that she says link weak fields with leukemia and other cancers are neither statistically significant nor free from systematic biases—and there are many negative studies.

I find it ironic that this review is in the same issue where Philip Anderson (page 9) says, "Results that rip the fabric [of science] to shreds must be expected to be almost invariably wrong." But Nair and her colleagues explain the "rip in the fabric" by Becker, Brodeur and herself as a "paradigm shift," thus kidnapping Thomas Kuhn's interesting concept to justify illegitimate science.

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1/91

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BECKER REPLIES: It is evident that Robert K. Adair's rejection of any biological effects from low-level electromagnetic fields rests entirely on the outmoded concept that kT must be exceeded for such effects to occur. This concept in turn rests upon the also outmoded biological concept that living things are simply chemical machines all of whose functions result from chemical reactions in an aqueous medium. The primary events in detection of light by the retina and in photosynthesis have for a long time clearly indicated that this is not so. Over the past few decades, additional capabilities of living things have been discovered that also violate the kT concept. These include microcrystalline magnetite deposits existing in conjunction with elements of the central nervous system that provide a sensing ability for very weak magnetic fields, and the sensitivity of the retina–pineal system to diurnal fluctuations in the geomagnetic field. At the cellular level, the evidence that extremely-low-frequency fields far below kT influence the kinetics of the cell cycle is overwhelming. Many thousands of humans with bone fractures that have failed to heal have