

to the editor

Greening of the physicists

There are a great variety of groups in this society that advocate all kinds of crackpot ideas and panaceas, such as those who publish "Science For the People," which pictures a clenched fist, in the typical hooligan-Communist style, on each cover of its issues. Just because these groups are wildly ostentatious, does not make them virtuous, intelligent, radical, powerful, youthful—or newsworthy—especially not newsworthy to a magazine supposedly dedicated to reporting the news of science.

Thus I read with dismay the cover story of your March 6, 1971, issue outlining the actions and goals of Scientists and Engineers for Social and Political Action (SESPA), written in such an extremely reverential manner.

Science is depicted as the villain in that article, being kept alive by an entrenched elite of "elders" with mental reflexes being their only guide. In fact, science has not only come through with the great, *pro-people* technological advances we have all witnessed in the 20th century (including nuclear bombs, which can be used for land-moving and excavation), but also has retained a rational outlook on life that has been forsaken by far too many other people in other disciplines. And what makes matters worse, science is depicted as the villain precisely *because* of its virtues (its "technological crapout," "compartmentalization" and "old-fashioned intellectual terms," as your writer so willingly quotes).

Your writer did not point up the absurdity of suggesting that everyone should be ashamed of his knowledge of nuclear energy because it might be used for evil purposes by others whose actions most of us have no responsibility for (such as the Communists). Or what about the poetic license (to give a euphemism for a "colloquial expression for fertilizer") taken by Dr. Schwartz when he suggested that the first experiment with plutonium took place over Nagasaki, when any scientist above the level of a village idiot knows that an enormous amount of intellectual and experimental effort was expended by thousands of physicists before anyone was even capable of planning an atomic bomb, much less exploding one. Fur-

thermore, it is pure sophistry to ask, as Dr. Schwartz did, "whether questions of morality [have] no place in science," since the statement is ambiguous as it stands, and could be correctly answered yes or no depending on its precise meaning, which Schwartz, I am sure, was careful not to delineate, so as to catch his answerer in a rash reply, which he then cashed in on as an example of a "separation of science from life"—still another *nonsequitur*.

I can not help adding that the "demonstrators" who forcibly took over Dr. Land's podium, decrying his corporation's alleged assistance to apartheid, gave their audience a "demonstration" of the same kind of disrespect for human rights that is practiced in South Africa against Negroes, and in doing so completely ignored the far greater dictatorships that exist behind the Iron Curtain. And *they* are the ones who have the gall to accuse a mythical establishment of "hypocrisy." . . .

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Your recent article on "The greening of the American Physical Society" is an interesting study in contrasting viewpoints and the conflicts they inevitably produce. The author begins by pointing out the disillusionment among younger physicists over declining employment in and growing public distrust of the physics community. He ends by quoting Dr. Robert Serber that "we live in a real world and are supported by society." May I suggest that the young radical who feels a deep sense of alienation might do well to ponder his plight in the light of Dr. Serber's remark? He may not like the close ties between Government money and scientific research. But, having forced a greater separation between the two, should he be so surprised when there is no money left? He may abhor some of the undesirable by-products of a highly productive technology. But, having put so much emphasis on this, should he then wonder why the average citizen is now suspicious of all science? In short, does he really think that his negative and abrasive tactics will actually produce the better society he so desperately seeks? But such is the plight of youth: It possesses the knowledge to see what is wrong and the zeal to fight it. But it lacks the wisdom and patience necessary to conceive and implement a strategy that will succeed in correcting those wrongs. Perhaps such wisdom comes only with age—with its tenured positions, high salaries and social perquisites.

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I must say that I found your article on the scientific—er—dilemma most interesting and refreshing reading.

But frankly, I just cannot see what the APS is so indignant about. What's the matter? Didn't they ever consider that they could have their nice financial rug pulled out from under *them*, too? National inflation is a very democratic affair: it hits *everybody* regardless of race, creed, color or college education (even self-centered physicists!).

If these people had shown the Government that they could work to solve problems such as pollution, overpopulation and starvation instead of building The Perfect Bomb or A Better Defoliant, they wouldn't be the first to feel it when Government budgets are cut.

And they certainly wouldn't have to go running for cover like so many scared rabbits whispering ". . . But we've given them *everything!* . . ."

Jay F. Pochapin
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Costs of health care

What is the source of your statistics in the first paragraph of the story "A new system of health care" (SN: 2/22/71, p. 142)? The statement, "Worse, health care prices have risen far faster than the general rate of inflation," should be viewed in the light of these facts: U.S. Department of Labor statistics showed that health care costs increased 12.9 percent in 1967-69. These same statistics show an increase in the cost of meat, poultry and fish of 13.6 percent, home ownership 18 percent, transportation 13 percent, and the cost of insurance increased over 20 percent.

The facts are that virtually everything costs more than it used to, and any national health program with attendant bureaucracy is not going to reduce the cost of health care.

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(The sources of the statements are the President's health message to Congress and Health, Education and Welfare statistics (SN: 2/6/71, p. 95), which show the consumer price index up only 30 percent since 1960 while hospital daily service charges have risen 170 percent, physician's fees by 60 percent and all medical care prices are up 55 percent. There would naturally be items that rose more rapidly in cost than medical expenses, but what the statement said was that health expenses have risen faster than the average.—Ed.)

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