Debate over psychosurgery continues

Peter R. Breggin, the Washington psychiatrist who would like to see psychosurgery outlawed (SN: 3/11/72, p. 174), presented his case late last week at the Houston Neurological Symposium sponsored by the University of Texas. Reaction was two-sided.

Breggin elicited emotional support from 19 local university students who disrupted the closing session of the meeting to present a resolution. It read: "We resolve that this body take a position against the use of psychosurgery. We hereby condemn the use of psychosurgical techniques in the United States, especially in institutions—prisons, schools, army, etc. Locating areas of the brain and surgically cutting, removing or substituting them to control 'violent and aggressive' behavior is unjustifiable. People are not violent because of a problem in their brain. They are violent because their conditions of life are intolerable. If a person is unemployed he may well resort to robbery. Prisoners who are constantly harassed by guards may resort to violence to protect themselves. Are all the black people who have rebelled in cities across the country crazy? How about the people who fought to win unions? Should the people of Vietnam be operated on because they fight against oppression? These techniques will be used on blacks, Latins and white working people who are forced by society to be violent and aggressive. They will be used to stop future Atticas. They will be used to rob the working class of some of its most militant leaders. . . . We call on this body to take a stand against racism and oppression by absolutely opposing the use of psychosurgery."

Scientists at the meeting were less emotional. No vote was taken on the resolution and the meeting closed. But Frank R. Ervin of Harvard University, one of the researchers mentioned by Breggin, told SCIENCE NEWS last week that "there is a germ of truth in what Breggin says." Added Ervin: "The whole science of behavior technology —of which surgery is only a tiny piece—is bustling along at full tilt and getting better all the time, i.e., more powerful all the time. And this is one of those technologies that we damn well better keep on top of socially and politically. People ought to know what is available and what is happening—such as who is using what tool to do which with. . . . Everybody ought to be thinking about these things. . . . Everybody ought to be involved, not just an elitist group." Breggin, Ervin says, may be getting more worked up than the situation calls for. But he is thinking about these things and he is getting more people involved.

of birth control when compared with oral contraceptives, sterilization and intrauterine devices.

Even so, the commission may have to recommend liberalized abortion because, at present, knowledge of and access to other forms of birth control are not universal. To lessen the impact of such a recommendation, the commission last week released results of a poll indicating that half of all Americans favor liberalized abortion laws (see page 186). When asked if the commission's aim to "promote the opportunity for the means of a free choice" included the freedom to have an abortion, Rockefeller said, "tune in next week." □

Forced busing and the Coleman Report

Busing has long been a practical means of getting children to school—especially in rural areas. But the Civil Rights movement and the U.S. Supreme Court have made busing more than a means of transportation. It has become a means of integration and the hottest issue of the 1972 campaign.

Moral, social, psychological and educational reasons have been cited by busing proponents. They believe racial strife can be overcome in the future by busing tactics in the present. Some of the educational arguments, however, may not be as strong as previously believed.

Support for the forced busing mandate came in 1966 from James S. Coleman of Johns Hopkins University. With data from the U.S. Office of Education on 570,000 students in 4,000 schools, he conducted an extensive survey on educational equality. He found that lower-class black children being educated with more economically advantaged students learned more than lower-class black students being educated with lower-class black students. Therefore, busing to achieve economic and racial integration seemed a possible means of ensuring equal education for disadvantaged blacks.

A reevaluation of the Coleman Report, undertaken by a group at Harvard University, was published this week by Random House as *On Equality of Educational Opportunity*. The book opens with an essay by Frederick Mosteller and Daniel P. Moynihan and contains 13 research papers. The studies, applying advanced mathematical and statistical methods, confirm Coleman's original findings but say he may have overstressed the effects of integration on education. Poor blacks did make gains when put in white classes, but the gains were too small to be of much value. The advantage of social class mixing is "very clear but very small," says Moynihan, "because schools don't much alter these things."

More important, says the Harvard report, is the effect of family background on education. Economic conditions, number of siblings and parental education and attitude (but not race) were found to be the most important factors in educational achievement—for anyone in any school. This fact was found by Coleman and is reinforced now. It implies that Governmental efforts to boost educational gains should be directed at improving economic conditions (and therefore the quality of home life) rather than at forced busing. It does not directly affect the moral, social and psychological reasons for busing. □

Congress measures metrication bills

Along with liberté, égalité and fraternité, the armies of Napoleon spread across Europe a system of measurements based on decimal notation and the rational bias of French philosophy of the time. Napoleon's system of measurement conquered where he did not, and in the end, although Russia could defeat his armies and Great Britain his navy, neither could defeat his meter sticks. The Bolsheviks standardized Russia on the metric system, and a few years ago, after a century and a half of blood, sweat, tears and compound fractions, the British capitulated. Since the remaining countries of the Commonwealth are following the British lead, the action leaves the United States the only holdout among industrialized nations.

But possibly not for long. Last week the Nixon Administration introduced a bill into Congress that would provide for changing U.S. measurements to metric units over a 10-year period. The Administration bill joined two already introduced: one in the Senate by Sen. Claiborne Pell (D–R.I.) and one in the House by Rep. Robert McClory (R–Ill.). The major difference among the bills is that the Pell bill would pro-

vide some Government subsidies to cover the costs of conversion, the others would let the costs "lie where they fall." All the bills would set up a board to plan and oversee the conversion. The bills are an outgrowth of a study conducted under Congressional authorization by the National Bureau of Standards.

Federal officials talk as if the changeover were inevitable. They would like the debate to center on how rather than whether. By this they hope to finesse any possible traditionalist opposition.

In fact the change is already taking place. Electrical technology has always been on metric units; there never were any electric units in the traditional system. Many manufacturers now maintain double inventories, and more and more imported goods (for example, automobiles) are now designed on metric standards.

Public awareness and acceptance of metric units has also been growing. Some years ago the U.S. pharmaceutical industry switched to metric units without any protest from either the straight or the nonstraight drug cultures. The overthirties blandly accept five milligrams of Valium, and the underthirties talk glibly of kilos of grass. Apropos of another kind of cigarette, can there be anyone in the country who has not heard the song about "a silly millimeter longer?" (It would sound even sillier at a twenty-fifth of an inch.)

But glibly speaking of kilos of meat may come harder. It is here, in the nitty-gritty of the checkout counter, that a metrication board, if one is established, may find its work cut out for it (or maybe ground up). Even in the most metricated countries, acceptance of the new units in regard to homey things has come slowest. In France they still speak of une livre (a pound) of meat, although they mean half a kilo. □

An international society for technology assessors

The movement to explore ways to assess the future impacts of new technologies is becoming institutionalized—albeit loosely and rather informally—at the international level. Last week in Washington a small group of scientists and scholars gathered to announce the establishment of the International Society for Technology Assessment.

The society hopes, through conferences and a quarterly journal, to provide a forum for persons and organizations interested in studying and controlling the unforeseen consequences of technological activities. It is not an anti-technology group; its belief is that "technology must be controlled, but not arbitrarily." As its chairman, Donald E. Cunningham, special assistant to the director of the National Science Foundation, put it, the hope is that ISTA's efforts will help "guide us between the alternate utopias and alternate doomsdays we hear so much about."

Robert Schumacher

Chorus, Hahn, Toffler, Cunningham: ISTA's founders want it to be non-elitist.

Other ISTA officers include its president, Walter Hahn (senior specialist for science and technology at the Library of Congress's Congressional Research Service); its vice chairman, Fred L. Polak of the European Translations Centre, Delft, The Netherlands; and its executive director, Claudius A. Chorus of The Hague, The Netherlands. ISTA's administrative offices will be in The Hague, its scientific offices in Washington.

ISTA's spokesmen hope it will not become a professional society in the traditional sense. "We hope not to be a 19th century elitist group" with membership based "on credentials, publications and approval of peers," says Hahn. Membership is open to anyone, including housewives, businessmen, lawyers and students. (Write ISTA, Suite 5038, 1629 K St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036 for membership information.)

"We are interested in taking questions of technological possibility out of the hands of relatively small elites," stressed Alvin Toffler, author of *Future Shock* and a member of ISTA. "We would like to see broader public involvement."

Exactly what ISTA will do is still not totally clear, but what is clear is that it will emphasize the identification of consequences and alternatives of technologies rather than merely opposition to them. For example the first issue of its journal, TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT, will deal with the idea "that technology assessment does not imply technology arrestment." And on the supersonic transport, Cunningham says ISTA people might have testified on both sides of the issue. "We would have tried to look at the matter in a larger perspective, rather than that of just one of the pressure groups."

As one of its first large efforts, ISTA will sponsor the First International Congress on Technology Assessment in March 1973 in The Hague. Invitations will be extended throughout the world to persons representing a cross section of interests, specialties and social views. □

Pollution abatement: Costs and benefits

New pollution-abatement controls—such as the 1975 air quality standards—will have their adverse effects on industrial employment over the next four years, but the benefits are likely to be large enough to offset the liabilities, says a new Council on Environmental Quality study.

Pollution controls are likely to result in a loss of 50,000 to 100,000 jobs in marginal industrial plants with old equipment, plants that probably would have closed a few years later anyway, CEQ says. Because jobs will also be created in pollution-abatement equipment industries, the net loss of jobs might be only 0.1 percent of current unemployment. At the same time, a major part of the estimated $16 billion damage caused annually by air pollution would be halted and significant benefits would be gained in abatement of other kinds of pollution, more beautiful cities and reduced morbidity and mortality.

Hardest hit would be an estimated 50 to 150 one-industry small towns. There would also be price increases and a dampening of economic growth.

A CEQ spokesman said the plant closings would be distributed over the 14 industries studied and thus would not strike any one industry particularly hard. He added that programs of the Commerce and Labor Departments can aid displaced workers and companies—as well as localities—in economic redevelopment, but that no specific programs now exist for remedying environmental unemployment. □