

to the editor

The changing APS

Your article "APS: Conservatives are reluctant dragons" (SN: 4/29/72, p. 278) describes well the soul-searching now going on in the American Physical Society. I am writing to amplify on a few of the matters touched on in that article.

As you noted, refusal by the Council to publish abstracts of four papers was one of the arguments that was advanced to demonstrate the need for the amendment. I don't think censorship is going to be the problem in the future that it was at the April Washington APS meeting. At that meeting the Forum on Physics and Society brought before the Council a proposal that henceforth the only substantive grounds for rejection of abstracts should be that they are either libelous, obscene, or outside the scope of concern of physics and physicists. The Council adopted this proposal, not quite in the strong form we would have preferred, but in acceptable language. Of course the formal question remains what is to be considered outside the proper professional concern of physicists, but I am hopeful that this has been empirically resolved; the horrible example of the public furor aroused by censorship at the Washington meeting will live long in the memory of the Council.

The American Physical Society is changing. It has an Economic Concerns Committee, and President Philip Morse has appointed a Committee on the Future of

Physics. How far-reaching these changes will be, and how fast they will come about, are the concern of all members of the Society, and of the Forum. We brought before the Council several proposals, for immediate action, relating to economic problems. We induced the Society, for the first time, to go on record as being concerned about the economic plight of physicists.

We in the Forum consider it long overdue that the APS concern itself with professional treatment of physicists. We are thinking about organizing a Committee on Professional Concerns, to propose standards for position termination, notice, etc. We suspect that the majority of physicists, anxious about their salary and employment, take a less narrow view than do the Olympians of the Council. At some point we may urge a referendum of the membership to discover what kind of Society the members want it to be. If such a poll is the true intent of the presently proposed Amendment on Professional Responsibility, against which I argued in Washington, it is certainly cleverly hidden. Its opponents, myself included, are appalled by the implications of directing the APS to "shun those activities which are judged to contribute harmfully to the welfare of mankind." We shall move forward, but not by excluding physics, or physicists, with whom we disagree.

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