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COVER: Bioengineering contraceptives for men should be commercially available in the next five years; once-a-month birth control pills for women and certainty for the rhythm method, within a decade; vaccinations against conception, within two decades. See p. 93. (Photo: Sperm cannot penetrate an antibody-coated egg, by C. A. Shivers, U. of Tenn.)

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Subscription Department
231 West Center Street
Marion, Ohio 43302

Subscription rate: 1 yr., \$10; 2 yrs., \$18; 3 yrs., \$25. (Add \$2 a year for Canada and Mexico, \$3 for all other countries.) Change of address: Four to six weeks' notice is required. Please state exactly how magazine is to be addressed. Include zip code.

Printed in U.S.A. Second class postage paid at Washington, D.C. Established as Science News Letter in mimeograph form March 13, 1922. Title registered as trademark U.S. and Canadian Patent Offices.

Published every Saturday by SCIENCE SERVICE, Inc., 1719 N. St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. (202-785-2255). Cable SCIENSERV.

Demystifying science's neutrality

In regard to your article "Science dissenters and social policy makers" (SN: 1/6/73, p. 5), we, as members of Science for the People (SFP) must respond to your comments about our actions at the AAAS convention in Washington this year.

SFP does not attempt to "stifle" any discussions. Rather, we find it stifling that the AAAS structures its sessions so that the all-knowing luminary pontificates to a passive audience with their latest technological solutions to social problems.

SFP seeks to open these sessions and equalize the opportunities for both audience and panel to present their views.

In light of James Coleman's admission that there is a lot of social research that is shoddy and that racist statements, in the guise of research, are actually nothing but statements of theory, we contend that the opening of these sessions is essential to the exposure of the lies, half-truths and racially biased reports passed off as scientific research.

SFP aims to demystify the political neutrality of science. Scientific research, teaching, advances and technology are by no means free of political bias. To this end we engage in open discussion with all members of the scientific community and those affected by it.

We encourage response, pro or con, to our politics and actions. Please address comments to the address below.

*Deborah Katz
Philip Ostrow
Science for the People
9 Walden St.
Jamaica Plain, Mass. 02130*

The environmental planner

I read your recent article, "Geologists and the public: Taking the initiative" (SN: 11/25/72, p. 340) with great interest. The role of the scientist in providing unbiased and thoroughly accurate raw data is a coveted posture, which I am sure most scientists feel would be jeopardized, if they were approached to make a value judgment in the policy-forming phase of land use planning.

I am also confident that such scientists would be reluctant to suggest a policy, which usually implicates natural, social and political sciences. Such a decision-maker must ideally take a multi-disciplinary approach, and belongs to the new breed of planners, the environmental planner.

An environmental plan is premised upon an ecological study, and is often general, but comprehensive. Therefore, it is a scientifically based guide to ensure a satisfactory balance between the needs and desires of the public and the supply of natural resources upon which the former depends. It guides the community's land use toward the highest use with the least expensive maintenance over time. It is thus a marriage of traditional methods and court-tested, scientifically founded new approaches to resolve old, but more complicated, problems. Nature consistently reminds us she is not a mistress to be abused, just as she dramatically demonstrated during the flood of Hurricane Agnes in June 1972. Less dramatic, but equally important examples would be septic field failure in the suburbs, which invites sewerage, a higher development density potential, and eventually the city with its pollution of air, water and noise.

Not surprisingly, many geologists and other scientists, who wish to implement their expertise, are training to become environmental planners; but until they are so qualified, they are usually, and quite understandably, reluctant to take the initiative directly to the public.

*R. Tek Nickerson
Environmental Planner
Cos Cob, Conn.*

Bison problem unresolved

May I congratulate you on Joan Arehart-Treichel's bison article last fall (SN: 9/2/72, p. 158). It is a pleasure to read an objective report that presents the views of both sides. I would stress that the proposal made to us would in fact mean killing more than 80 percent of the total park bison population because we can trap on only one of the three main wintering areas. (Wilderness zoning precludes consideration of trapping in the Pelican and Mary Mountain areas.)

I delayed commenting because I had hoped by this time to tell you that the controversy had been settled. However, we seem to be still far from reaching an agreement with the livestock interests and the Department of Agriculture.

*Mary Meagher
Research Scientist
National Park Service
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(Additional letters on p. 88)

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