

SCIENCE NEWS

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to the editor

Superconductivity

In making predictions of high temperature superconductivity (SN: 9/20, p. 251), way back in 1964 we fully recognized that it would take at least 5 to 10 years to synthesize even the first macromolecule of the type we wanted. There were some who expected results overnight and these were undoubtedly disappointed, and in that sense their mood changed to pessimism perhaps. For those of us who were more aware of the difficulties, the progress has been quite remarkable because the various formidable barriers, such as the dimensionality problem, screening and others have virtually dissolved under persistent scrutiny and ours has been a mood of growing optimism, not on whether this feat will be achieved but how soon.

One further point—as I heard it, Prof. V. L. Ginzburg's remark was: "A pessimist is an ill-informed optimist," rather than "well-informed." And, secondly, "An optimist is a well-instructed pessimist." Some further instruction remains to be done.

Otherwise Dietrick Thomsen captured rather well something of the present feeling on these matters.

*Dr. William A. Little
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Problem with prophets

The involvement with the future, as Dr. Ramo proposes it in his guest editorial (SN: 10/11, p. 321), sounds like some kind of collective schizophrenia. For such a system of planning really to work, that is, for man to effectively anticipate and act upon that which is only a bare probability, would necessitate a major genetic overhaul for an animal which has heretofore taken collective action only after an actual problem has arisen.

The problem with prophets, at least as they have been employed over the last few thousand years, is that once you start believing in them you have to assign priorities to their dire predictions. For example, there were many times when top priority was assigned to forecasts of doom, and when people went off to the hills to prepare for the end, the crops failed.

*Robert P. Burruss
Chevy Chase, Md.*

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