

and
then
there
was
one

From the editors desk

We agree with the Atomic Energy Commission's Dr. Gerald F. Tape that the downturn in the fortunes of the 300 GeV proton accelerator proposed for CERN makes it even more urgent that the U.S. proceed with its 200-400 GeV Weston machine. It is probable that Dr. Tape's feeling of urgency stems from a feeling for high energy physics: that there is a frontier that even the 70 GeV accelerator in operation at Serpukhov won't cross; that the world desperately needs the higher magnifications, and that there must always be one bigger accelerator in the works, preferably in the U.S., to provide it.

As we say, we agree with Dr. Tape on Weston, but not principally because of the need for higher energies in physics experiments.

We'd be just as happy to see Dr. Panofsky get the storage rings he so desperately wants for his accelerator at Stanford. But that would make us no happier than we would be if Caltech were to get the array of 130-foot radiotelescopes it wants at Owens Valley, if the National Science Foundation were suddenly to find the money to build a 400-inch optical telescope or the National Institutes of Health could fund 200 new fellowships in microbial genetics.

The unfortunate aspect of the scuttling by the British of the CERN accelerator (see p. 30) is not the scuttling itself; indeed there is some possibility that the machine will not stay scuttled, or that Weston's international commitment can be expanded to take up the slack. High energy physics itself will not suffer irreversibly.

The tragedy lies in the reasoning of Prime Minister Wilson's Government, and the extent to which it matches reasoning processes current in the United States.

Mr. Wilson's decision to save major science support funds for those projects which promise economic returns commensurate with the investment is reminiscent of President Johnson's admonition to his research administrators. More than two years ago he charged them to find areas in which more direct and rapid payoffs from research expenditures might be found for the American people who are paying the bills. As a result, support of basic research in the U.S. went into decline.

That is what makes Weston urgent.

The United States has a responsibility to its future to guarantee that the ferment created during the last quarter century by a commitment to science not be allowed to die. It has as well a moral responsibility to those university graduates seduced into careers in science in the last two decades by what seemed a permanent national commitment.

Neither responsibility is met by a refusal to support necessary growth of basic research—programs which cost less than one percent of the Federal budget and an infinitesimal fraction of the gross national product—because the results are not immediately apparent.

Though we lack the parochial commitment to high energy physics per se that Dr. Tape might feel, we must agree that one more major scientific project apparently headed for the scrapheap makes it that much more urgent that every new one be carefully nurtured. It may be the last of a dying breed.

Warren Kornberg