

approved by the censor and according to the law, nothing can prevent Mr Kriz from using his scientific degrees.

I would like to end by appealing to all scientists who are lucky enough to live in free democratic countries: please, do help actively our colleagues who are deprived of their human rights and are kept in prisons or are dying slowly in concentration camps and psychiatric hospitals, no matter where. If we do not help them, nobody will. After all, passive humanitarianism helps no one except the totalitarian regimes.

E. ANTONCIK

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Trieste centre

SIR,—We must indeed be grateful for the letter from Sir David Martin and Mr Cozens (December 20/27) on the policy of the Royal Society UNESCO committee concerning the International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) at Trieste. Many of us who have been closely connected with the scientific programmes of the ICTP were relieved to learn that the British delegate to the recent UNESCO General Conference praised the centre, and voted for the full proposed financial contribution from UNESCO for 1975 and 1976. To that extent, at least, we have succeeded in our efforts (such as the meeting of the Royal Society on May 16, 1974) to ensure that this committee is fully informed about the work of the centre and is no longer taking decisions without reference to ascertainable opinion amongst British physicists.

The last paragraph of this letter further invites comment on the policy with which the British UNESCO delegation should approach the proposed review of "UNESCO's relations with and subvention to the centre". It is to be hoped that this policy will not be decided without thorough consultation, by the whole committee, with those who understand the situation at Trieste.

A kite is being flown, for example, that the ICTP could be financed mainly by direct contributions from individual governments or national scientific organisations, thus taking the burden from United Nations agencies such as UNESCO and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). This would be a disaster. As I thought was obvious from my article in *Nature* on March 22, the administrative resources of the ICTP are quite inadequate to the solicitation and collection of such contributions. It is able to carry out a valuable scientific programme on behalf of all nations, without serious political disruption, because it is a technical instrument through which a small number of international agencies (including the UN Development Program and the Swedish International Development Agency) channel their

efforts. Additional contributions from individual governmental organisations, such as Britain's Science Research Council, are very welcome, and are not inappropriate considering the scientific work that is actually done at Trieste by physicists from Britain and other advanced countries, but there is no substitute for the basic budget, shared by UNESCO, the IAEA and the Italian Government, that keeps the centre in active being. The real questions, rather, are the formal place of the contribution to the ICTP in the UNESCO budget, and the administrative devices by which it is maintained as a permanent institution within both UNESCO and the IAEA.

In view of the time and trouble it has taken in the past to get the facts about Trieste across to the British UNESCO delegation, it is not too early to air these issues in your columns (or in some suitably ventilated corridor!) in preparation for a wise decision in 1975 or 1976.

JOHN ZIMAN

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Hungarian attitudes

SIR,—Dr Peller's Hungarian experience (December 13) will only surprise those who believe that Hungary is a 'liberal' east-block state. In a very restricted sense this is true, but life for research workers in Hungary is difficult, and especially so if they intend to travel westwards. Outward evidence of the internal situation is shown by the difficulties Western scientists sometimes encounter if they want to travel in Hungary. As a former coworker in a research institute in Budapest, I had the opportunity of participating in the Conference of Solid State Physics held in Manchester in January 1966. I also intended to make a contribution and, as is the usual case in Hungary, I should have received by passport just one day before my travel. On that very day the Ministry for Metallurgical and Engineering Industry, my 'higher' authority, told me that I would not get a passport. No reason for this decision was given. This was only one typical case among several similar ones during the 17 years of my scientific career in Hungary. In general, for a young scientist, professional travels to Western countries are possible only if he is 'politically reliable'.

Undoubtedly only few entry applications are rejected. Israelis are especially not welcome, probably because of the great number of Jews living in Budapest, who might get authentic information on the real situation in the Middle East. Western scientists who have participated in a conference in Hungary, however, are in general delighted by the traditional hospitality of the organisers and this

helps to mask the autocratic treatment of the international scientific communities by the authorities.

LAJOS ERNST

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University consultancy

SIR,—I would like to support Mr H. A. Cook's letter (December 13). Although I am not certain that all consultancy by university staff should be discouraged, for after all this is one way in which the results of research are transferred to industry, I am more particularly concerned at the use of university facilities for the production of hardware for commercial purposes.

In this company we are aware of at least two instances in which companies have been formed by university staff to manufacture equipment which is in direct competition with some of our own products. We are also aware that these companies have no manufacturing facilities of their own and that university plant, equipment and man-hours are used in the production of this equipment.

In effect, such companies have extremely small overheads which makes competition very difficult for a company like ours where all the research and development work must be paid for from profits.

I agree completely with Mr Cook that the appropriate government department should put a stop to the extracurricular activities of those university staff who, in effect, are being paid two salaries for doing one job and are using public funds under false pretences.

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Periodic unification

SIR,—In your issue of October 25, page 661, paragraph three, there appeared an anonymous quotation and comment about the reception of some of Mr Edward Haskell's work, referring to a conference held in New York in 1971. The item: "'We had to listen to some extraordinary ideas of unification by way of Mendeleev's periodic table' said one participant. Another was horrified that whilst the scientists thought it silly, the philosophers present took it very seriously." I wish to set the record straight. There may have been more than one scientist who thought Haskell's work silly—blindness that was found in attitudes of some scientists towards precursors of Mendeleev's table. I can, however, certify that not only the philosophers present but also a number of highly qualified scientists who were also there, and who read Haskell's work, take it very seriously indeed.

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