

Soviet accusation

Plagiarism charges levelled

Two leading members of the Academy of Sciences of the Byelorussian SSR have accused a US professor, Dr Hollis B. Chen, of plagiarism. Writing in the Russian weekly *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, Dr Mikolaj Barysevich, president of the Byelorussian Academy, and Dr Barys Sciapanau, a three-times State Prize winner, have accused Chen of pirating chapters 3–6 of his textbook *Theory of Electromagnetic Waves — a Coordinate-Free Approach* (McGraw Hill, 1985). This material, they claim, was lifted without acknowledgement from two monographs by Dr Fiodar Fiodarau, son of the Byelorussian writer Janka Maur. Fiodarau is a leading light of the Byelorussian Academy, and is secretary of its section of physical, mathematical and technical sciences.

According to Barysevich and Sciapanau, the “coordinate-free” method was pioneered by Fiodarau more than 30 years ago. On the basis of this “fruitful approach”, they say, he has published six monographs and “hundreds of scientific articles”. Chen’s work, they allege, is based on two of three works, the monograph *Optics of Anisotropic Media* (Minsk, 1958) and the book *Theory of Gyrotropy* (Minsk, 1976). Both works are fairly obscure, having been published, the critics admit, “a fairly long time ago, in a small edition, and from an obscure scientific press (*Navuka i Technika*, Minsk).

Their accusations may be summarized under four points.

- Chen, they say, claims on the blurb that his method is new, and that the book “for the first time treats the essence of the subject fully on a coordinate-free basis”;
- Chen’s bibliography makes no reference to Fiodarau in its more than 200 items;
- Chapters 3–6 of Chen’s book are almost completely copies from Fiodarau, and, in particular, the diagrams have been lifted unchanged;
- Chen’s book, “contrary to academic-

Chen’s statement

“This book is intended as a text for seniors and first-year graduate students, not Research monograph. The development of the book relies heavily on my previous research work on waves in plasma and the published work of the others as stated in the preface. I have never claimed the creation of the new method. In fact, the vectors and dyads were invented in 1881 by Professor J.W. Gibbs of Yale University. Unfortunately, I do not read Russian and most of my references were in English. This is because the focus was on developing a strong textbook in electromagnetic waves rather than a comprehensive research monograph”. □

tradition”, does not give references, within the body of the text, to the works mentioned in the footnotes. This, say the critics, is to avoid revealing how much material is derived from Fiodarau.

The complaint ends by listing the many learned societies to which Chen belongs, in terms that leave no doubt that, in the opinion of the critics, he should be expelled as “one of the most cynical and shameless plagiarists in the history of science”.

Examination of the book does not appear to substantiate these allegations. Chen’s work, a textbook for final-year undergraduate and graduate students, does not claim any novelty of method, although his preface does speak of its

being an “alternative approach”, a coordinate-free approach, and notes that “the organization of the book is somewhat different from that normally found in books on electromagnetics”. His diagrams, in the disputed Chapters 3–6 in particular, seem standard vectorial representations of such phenomena as refraction and reflection. But Chen in fact makes little claim to novelty and was not, he said, responsible for the jacket. In a statement to *Nature* last week he says that he had never claimed the creation of a new method, and maintains that he had relied heavily on the previous work of others. The book is not, he emphasizes, a research monograph but a university text. He therefore makes little reference to work published in languages other than English. He has no knowledge, he stresses, of Russian. **Vera Rich**

Australian universities

Going private pleasantly?

Sydney

PLANS for a private university that would break the public monopoly in higher education are attracting strong opposition from academics, in particular university staff associations and teachers’ groups. The address of the Bond University of Technology is Miami, Surfers Paradise, on Queensland’s Gold Coast, one of Australia’s most pleasant areas. It will open its doors in 1989 to a first intake of 1,000 out of a planned total of 10,000 students, many of whom will be from overseas, particularly from Japan and South-East Asia. But the organizers hope that at least half of the students will come from Australia’s free government tertiary institutions.

The university is the brainchild of businessman Alan Bond, of America’s Cup fame. Funds for the university will come equally from the Bond Corporation and a Japanese development company represented by Dr Bungo Ishizaki of the Osaka University of Commerce. The university will be run as a non-profit body with operating costs covered entirely by student fees. The backers intend to make their investment pay by capitalizing on products and inventions arising from research carried out in the university.

High salaries will be offered to attract talented staff and the position of vice-chancellor is being advertised at a salary of A\$150,000, substantially higher than that for a similar post at an existing university.

Criticisms of the Bond University include doubts about the standard of its courses and whether or not the range of subjects to be offered warrants the title of university. The main reason for opposition seems to be the threat it poses to Australia’s egalitarian education system by creating an elite of those who can afford to pay. One fear is that, once the institution is established,

it may be successful in pressing the government for assistance, and that with the proliferation of such private institutions, existing establishments will be left with an ever smaller cake to cut up. Others worry that the institution will become a last resort for those not bright enough to gain admittance elsewhere. And there is concern over the destabilizing effect of the high salaries on the rigid salary structure of the government institutions.

Supporters feel that the quality of present universities is suffering because of the restrictions that accompany government funding. Dr Ian Bassett, a senior lecturer in physics at the University of Sydney, believes that salary flexibility is vital to attract outstanding people. Present arrangements of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) prevent universities from offering higher salaries even if the extra comes from private sources. When the University of Sydney recently gave its vice-chancellor a few thousand dollars extra, the same amount was taken out of the following year’s grant. And the present rigidity in salaries fails to recognize that it is more difficult to attract talented staff to some disciplines than to others.

In defence of its own plan, the Bond Corporation points out that it is in line with the government’s policy of encouraging more contact between academics and industry. Furthermore, with a rapidly growing population of 370,000, the Gold Coast region is the seventh largest population centre in Australia and the only one of its size without a university. The present climate of restraint in government spending is unlikely to give the region another chance to get one say the supporters of the Bond plan.

Charles Morgan