Publishing without Review

Abelson's point is very well taken in his editorial "Information exchange groups" (11 Nov., p. 727). I am familiar with a number of similar expedients to beat, so to speak, the system of adequate review and responsible authorship. He did not mention them, but there are two other ways to circumvent review. One is the publication in book form of papers given at symposia and the other, the "transactions" published by some engineering societies. The latter are open to discussion but, in the meantime, one can have just about anything printed. Fortunately, symposia proceedings are usually very slow in coming out and are not attractive as a medium. He also did not mention a cause for preferment of unreviewed and unedited publication media: the need for gathering what the trade knows as "brownie points" under the "Publish or Perish" system.

As I see it, the only solution is the speeding up of publication in reputable journals and increasingly incisive screening. Also, we need administrative policies of government agencies and universities toward the suppression of quasi-journals. I would welcome continued editorial focus on this problem in your columns.

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Spreading the Gospel

By coincidence, shortly before reading Van Vleck's letter ("Population stabilization," 7 Oct.), I talked to two high school biology classes about the need to stabilize human populations. I can attest that such concepts, including birth control, were accepted with aplomb by sophomores. In fact, I am convinced that the high school biology course is an ideal place to introduce this problem. When it follows the study of the simple principles of animal and plant ecology such as is found in many texts, especially the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study texts, population control is quite comprehensible to the student. He can understand why man has instinctively been so diligent and successful in turning his efforts to death control, and has been reluctant to interfere with his own reproduction. The conflict becomes apparent and leads to the conclusion

that, in order to compensate for our successful death control, we must introduce a conscious, well planned, and vigorous program of birth control.

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Hickman's "Oases for the future" (4 Nov., p. 612) provides startling data and interesting speculation regarding the uses and conservation of our water supplies. Human ingenuity is probably capable of achieving the science-fiction advances that Hickman discusses. But it should be recognized that the primary purpose of such proposals is to make room for increasing populations. If, instead of developing such schemes, men have the courage and wisdom to direct even a fraction as much ingenuity, effort, and capital into a program of population adjustment to bring the birth and death rates into balance during the next two or three decades, the quality of living for individuals and the world generally would be incomparably better and more attractive.

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"Krow" Units: A New Evaluation

Considerable discussion revolves around the productivity of research workers and its lack of criteria for evaluation. It occurred to me that such productivity could be expressed in some objective form. This would greatly facilitate evaluation and also provide criteria for determining when a unit of research work is completed. I would like to suggest that the minimal unit of research activity which is internally consistent and illustrates a specific cause and effect relationship be designated as one "Krow" unit. I recognize that there are research activities and publications which qualify as "Multi-Krow," and similarly, the individual steps or logical progressions which ultimately constitute a "Krow" could be designated as "Milli-Krow," while the elemental beginnings of an investigation (and in some less fortunate circumstances, the actual work itself) might be considered as "Micro-Krow" units.

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