Letters

A "Vendetta"?

Greenberg began his second article on "The National Academy of Sciences: Profile of an Institution (II)" (21 Apr., p. 360) with these words:

At 9:30 a.m. on 24 April 1950, the 87th annual meeting of the National Academy of Sciences was called to order by President Alfred Newton Richards. When the meeting ended the next day, vengeance had been exacted in a vendetta seething since World War II.

That statement gives a distorted impression of the motives of those who led the movement to elect Detlev Bronk as president. I wish to set the record straight.

At a meeting of the Academy on 17 November 1947, I presented a prepared criticism of its policies from which I quote the following significant items:

The announcement that this program would be given over to a discussion of the policies of the Academy aroused great interest among my fellow members in Berkeley, and fifteen of us gathered for dinner and an evening of discussion. General agreement was reached upon views which, since only two or three of us were to attend this meeting, I was urged to present. . . .

A year that I spent in London . . . [1943–44] afforded many opportunities to compare the levels on which British and American scientists were able to operate, and also to compare the Royal Society with the National Academy of Sciences. . . . The Royal Society is the more effective organization: in stimulating scientific effort, in giving dignity to science, and in giving weight to scientific opinion on questions of public policy. . . .

Many of us cannot understand why the Academy should not assert itself more strongly in its role of scientific advisor to the nation; why it should have to give way to some other agency in time of war, and why, either in war or peace, its opinions seem to be expressed only on request . . . Why, Mr. President, must we wait till after three o'clock today before being allowed to discuss anything?

It may be that we in far off California do not know what is going on; if so, let us be enlightened. Why, one may ask, are we ignorant? Or do we misjudge the temper of the general membership? Perhaps the majority do not wish to be bothered with such questions; perhaps they are satisfied merely to elect new members and write obituaries; to express opinions only if and when the Government thinks to ask for them. Perhaps the Academy is not really important. However, if that is the case, and university presidents come to suspect it, then the Academy will not well perform even the meanest of its functions, that of hinting to presidents that election to its membership is sufficiently significant to be recognized by a modest increase in salary. The results of this and subsequent meetings should give the answer.

The views I voiced were strongly endorsed by many, including Homer Adkins, Marston Morse, R. M. Yerkes, W. F. Durand, Jerome Hunsaker, Harlow Shapley, and Merle Tuve. The Academy became more active under the administration of A. N. Richards as president, and especially under "Det" Bronk, as chairman of the National Research Council.

The minutes of the Council of the Academy of 7 January 1950 include the following items:

President Richards submitted his decision to resign from the office of President of the Academy, for reasons of age and health, to become effective June 30, 1950. The decision was accepted by the Council with expressions of regret that he was unable to continue the position of leadership which he has so ably upheld, and with gratitude for his having guided the Academy through difficult times during the past three years.

Committee on Nominations for Officers

It was the consensus that the task of selecting a nominee for President would require a larger Committee on Nominations for Officers than that announced at the 1949 Autumn Meeting (Messrs. E. C. Stakman, Chairman; Leonard Carmichael, Harvey Fletcher, and Paul W. Merrill).

It was pointed out that the increasing obligations of the Academy require that the president devote a great deal of time to the duties of his office. There was some discussion of what the executive structure of the office of the President should be. Mention was made of the desirability of having an Academy member as a full-time executive aide in the position of Vice President or Home Secretary. Such a full-time position would involve certain relationships with the National Research Council.

A proposal submitted in writing by Mr. Hildebrand was that the office of President of the Academy carry a salary of $15,000 (with a $5,000 expense account), for the following reasons:

1. The duties of the office are now so extensive and onerous as to require practically full time.
2. With full time, the influence and effectiveness of the office and of the Academy could be substantially increased.
3. It is not reasonable to expect a president to hold the office at a serious financial sacrifice.
4. The field of choice for candidates is now practically limited to the few men, mainly emeriti, who have the necessary vitality, physical and intellectual, and also a sufficient spirit of sacrifice, like President Richards, to be willing to undertake the job; but the Academy should be in a position to command the services of the best man regardless of other considerations.
5. In an environment where men are rated to a considerable extent by what they are paid, the dignity of the office requires that the scientists of the Academy rate their president in this respect on a par with the men in government with whom the President of the Academy must deal.

We who held the foregoing view of the office of president were dismayed when the committee nominated James B. Conant, who did not fit our specifications. As president of Harvard University, he would have had little time to give to the Academy, nor had he ever shown any interest in its affairs; it was to be expected that the presidency of the Academy would be for him just another honor.

The situation was discussed among the Berkeley members; and, prior to the meeting on 24 April 1950, the chemistry section of the Academy, at the initiative of my colleague, Wendell M. Latimer, decided unanimously, as individuals, to support the election of Bronk.

Neither Latimer, in nominating Bronk, nor those who supported his nomination, said anything derogatory of Conant; each simply extolled Bronk's qualifications as shown by his immense and devoted service as chairman of the Research Council. All were confident that he would be a virtually full-time president.

No one is in a position to assess the motives of the individuals who voted to elect Bronk. There were undoubtedly some whose experiences with the National Defense Research Committee had convinced them that its rather authoritarian structure was inappropriate for peacetime operations, but surely the number who had any cause to seek "vengeance" were far too few to ac-

count for the election of Bronk. Efforts to vitalize the Academy into the effective organization that it has become under the leadership of Bronk and Seitz began 2 years before the nomination of Conant, and had acquired sufficient momentum by April 1950 to override a nomination that to the majority meant a return of the Academy to the functions of "electing members and writing obituaries." It is pure journalese to ascribe the election of Bronk to a "seething vendetta."

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L'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei

The issue of 11 March 1966 contained an excellent article, by Stillman Drake, on the Accademia dei Lincei. The article was mainly devoted to the early history of the academy and its connection with Galileo. The purpose of this letter is to draw attention to another recent publication, *L'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* (ed. 2, 1966, quarto, 68 pages), by Mauro Picone, the eminent mathematician who is now academician-administrator of the academy. The book contains a short history of the academy, with a list of some of the great men of the past who were members of this illustrious body; some details about the numerous publications of the academy; and a list of the recipients of its periodic prizes, which are awarded on a worldwide basis to scientists, writers, and artists who make outstanding contributions to the world's knowledge and culture. (Some of the awards are in monetary value equal to or superior to the Nobel Prizes. Among the several American recipients are Wallace O. Fenn and Albert Bruce Sabin, who received prizes in medicine in 1964.)

The book contains a reproduction of the academy's constitution with the signatures of its earliest members, including Galileo, and 17 large photographs of the two beautiful and historic palaces, Palazzo Corsini and Villa Farnesina, occupied by the academy. It may be ordered for 3500 lire ($5.80) from the Office of Publications, L'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Via della Lungara 10, Rome.

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Fish Meal: Food of the Ancients

At last the FDA has approved the use of fish meal as a food additive for human consumption (News in Brief, 3 Mar., p. 1087). May I quote from Arrian's account of the voyage of Nearchus along the eastern shore of the Persian Gulf in the year 325 B.C. (*1*). And may I call this quotation especially to the attention of my friend, Ed Muskie, who has worked so hard to promote this addition to the industries of Maine.

> Below the Gadrosians . . . dwell the people called "The Fish Eaters." . . . Thinking here to seize corn by force Nearchus attacked the town, but the natives showed freely their flour, ground down from dried fish; but only a small quantity of corn and barley. . . . Only a few of them fish, for few have proper boats or any skill; for the most part it is the receding tide which leaves fish in pools which provide their catch. The more tender ones they eat raw, the larger and tougher ones they dry in the sun until quite sere and then pound them and make flour and a bread of them. . . . Even their flocks are fed on dried fish so that the mutton has a fishy taste like the flesh of sea birds.

While I trust the modern product is more palatable than that found by Nearchus, I commend to the reader the patience of the Ichthyophagae who, after 2292 years, have at last succeeded in selling their idea to the government of the United States.

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Reference

1. Condensed from *Arrian*, "History of Alexander and Indica," Robson, trans. (Harvard Univ. Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1933), vol. 2, pp. 383, 393.

Ph.D.'s and the Mother Tongue

The retention of Ph.D. foreign language requirements by a university is justified only if foreign languages are needed in a particular field of study. If so, those languages should be *used* during the graduate student's education with readings assigned for seminars or classes. Papers and research projects should refer to literature in those languages, not merely as a linguistic exercise but because the literature is essential to the field. If a graduate student can get his doctorate with no exposure to foreign languages beyond being tested in them, then the requirements are unneeded.