

Letters

Fest Me No Schriften

In the last few months, I have been asked to contribute to three *Festschriften*. I declined two of these invitations because I had never been a student of or a colleague of the particular man being fested, and my *Schrift* list is pretty long already. The other I accepted. I wrote an article in honor of a man who had been both teacher and colleague. I fussed and postponed getting at the job. I love and honor this man, and the idea of "giving" him an article as a memento of my regard was—and is—distasteful. I finally decided to do a simple, largely descriptive article, based on my own fieldwork, about a subject to which he made, 30 years ago, what is still the major contribution (a fact which my article did not forward very well either). But he had taught me the principles and the value of ethnography—I still regard it as highly or more highly than I do more "sophisticated breakthroughs." I tried to make my article simple without making it lightweight. But it wasn't easy. I was emotionally involved—not with the material, but with him. I wrote it, and feel that it is inadequate—not so much as an article, but as a statement of my regard, as a prestation. I knew before that I did not like *Festschriften* (and neither, of course, do publishers—they are the hardest of all books to peddle to publishers). I began to understand my dislike.

A few weeks later, I had to read about a topic that had been peripheral to my interests. Three of the articles in my original short bibliography on that subject were in *Festschriften*. To my astonishment, I batted 100 percent at our university library (a very large portion of which, in part for storage reasons, rests on the shelves of professors, to be recalled only if anybody else happens to need it). All three *Festschriften* were on the shelves. Because I am the kind of egghead who cannot

look at only one article in a book, I also looked at the rest of them (I did not say read—I am not *that* kind of egghead). In none of them did I find anything of interest except the specific article that I wanted. However, I knew two of the men who were being "honored." With a little bit of empathy, I found myself asking the question that they would never have uttered, out of good taste if not out of a desire to preserve a favorable narcissistic balance: "Is that all?" All of these "honored" scholars were indeed honorable scholars and gentlemen. But, "Is that all?"

I am still some years from *Festschrift* age, even if I ever have any "devoted" students. But I had a few hours of worry. Will anybody sum up my efforts with a collection of essays that I can read and say, "Is *that* all they made of it?" Obviously, in every case, the man's work had been worth much more.

A *Festschrift* is a gold watch, with engraving on the back. It is a suitcase, of genuine elephant skin, perhaps, and with gold-plated fittings, but nevertheless a going-away present. I have long since got used to the fact that I will be going away. But I would prefer to go with my own luggage and not have to pack an extra book (that I cannot in all decency sell with the rest of my overcrowded library) which says to me, sitting there on the shelf, "Is *that* all?"

I would ask, "Who *likes Festschriften*?" Who would be hurt if he did not get one? Publishers would rejoice, and journal editors might have better pickings. And most of all, the "honored" scholar would not have to pack a book that may bring some good memories about people—if he can just get over the contents. In short, I would beg, *Fest me no Schriften*. The world, my discipline, and I already have enough of a load to carry.

PAUL BOHANNAN
Department of Anthropology,
Northwestern University,
Evanston, Illinois 60201

After Bryce Nelson's article "HEW: Finch tries to gain control over department's advisory groups" (16 May, p. 813) was published, the department completed its review of the procedures for selecting members of public advisory committees. The department conducts a continuing evaluation of the usefulness of and need for specific committees, with the objective of keeping the number of such committees consistent with program needs. Special attention has been given to the many committees advising the Department's Public Health Service agencies.

The temporary directive that the Secretary would select all committee members has been superseded. Authority to select members of the many Public Health Service committees providing initial, technical review of grant applications has been redelegated to the appropriate agency heads.

Authority to select members for the National Advisory Councils, which review grant applications for program relevance, budgetary feasibility, and policy advisability, as well as for committees which advise the agencies on their programs and policies, remains in the Office of the Secretary, as has been the case in years past.

Professional competence and objectivity, so necessary in members of policy-oriented scientific advisory committees, are the primary criteria for selection. In addition, adequate representation by informed laymen as well as geographic, ethnic, and professional interest group balance are important factors.

JESSE L. STEINFELD
Office of the Secretary,
Department of Health, Education, and
Welfare, Washington, D.C. 20201

Wages Restrict Steel Competition

Abelson's editorial, "Crumbling foundations of prosperity" (12 Sept., p. 1069), described in vivid terms what is happening to our chemical industry as it is faced with competition from equivalent industrial technology abroad in the manufacture of ethylene. This is in spite of the fact that, as he put it, "our chemical industry has long been a leader in research activity."

In the same editorial the steel indus-

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try is taken to task for being caught in an equivalent situation and criticized as "... complacent, and slow to adopt the basic oxygen furnace." In fact, the problem of growing imports of steel and ethylene have practically nothing to do with technology but everything to do with economics. Wages in the steel industry in the United States in 1967 were two and one-half times greater than those in Europe and four times greater than those in Japan. Those ratios may be even higher today. With equivalent technology and equipment, and roughly equivalent raw material costs, the competitive advantage to the foreigners is obvious. The high cost of labor may be a factor in the ethylene problem, but it applies even more significantly to the steel industry, where labor makes up a larger ingredient of the finished product. The very newest steel plants, constructed with the finest technology now available (including not only the basic oxygen furnace but many other innovations not so widely publicized) still can't cope with prices quoted from abroad—primarily because of the labor factor. In addition, some foreign governments make it even harder to compete by providing their steel and chemical industries with much more liberal tax laws and depreciation allowances, sometimes even subsidies, while they tax heavily or completely bar imports from the United States.

The problem is difficult. I'm afraid it's going to get worse before it gets better. Textiles, glass, electronics, steel, and now petro-chemicals are facing it. Soon the automotive industry will hurt even more. As foreign plant facilities continue to improve, who knows where it will end? As long as the wide wage discrepancy exists, and as long as our government refuses to provide suitable protection for our basic industries which make these high wages and our enviable standard of living possible, the "foundations of prosperity" will surely continue to crumble.

STEWART G. FLETCHER

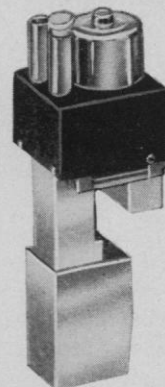
7 Saxman Drive,
Latrobe, Pennsylvania 15650

Impoverished Latin American Science

As a scientist who has worked to improve Latin American science, I would like to reaffirm Nussenzweig's concern ("Migration of scientists from Latin America," 26 Sept., p. 1328). In addition,

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