

# Letters

## The Question of South Africa

To respond to Jeffrey Hoffman's letter (3 Sept., p. 868) with anything less than wholehearted support is to risk being condemned as a racist and a reactionary. [The letter invited readers to join in a protest against the support given by the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory and the Harvard College Observatory to the Boyden Observatory in South Africa.] I run that risk because I think Hoffman does a disservice to astronomy and to political reform in South Africa.

The British newspaper the *Guardian* described Hoffman's letter as a call for a ban on "South African aid" (1) and speculated about the effect that such a call might have on the proposal, which I originated, to develop a new astronomical venture at Sutherland in the Karoo. I am delighted that this proposal is now being carried out as a joint British-South African venture, although I left the employ of the British in South Africa largely because I could get nowhere with it when I made the suggestion 5 years ago.

This is not just a question of South African aid. Foreign observatories are established in South Africa because of the scientific opportunities available there. All the most interesting sky objects are in the south, and South Africa is one of the few areas from which their observation is possible. Sometimes, as in the case of the 1971 expeditions to South Africa to observe Jupiter, there is no alternative. British optical astronomy, currently in a depressed state, would have been practically nonexistent over the past 20 years but for British operations at Pretoria and Cape Town.

Successive South African governments have facilitated the operation of foreign observatories on their soil for a long time. The Boyden Observatory at Bloemfontein has received many kinds of help from South African sources, including the construction of houses and the relocation of the Defence Force Tank School, which threatened the environment of the station.

The Boyden Observatory was origi-

nally supported by Harvard alone but is now controlled by a consortium of European nations. It has had no continuing director and has received too little money to maintain either a high standard of astronomy or a high reputation for Harvard in South Africa. It is high time to increase contributions for its support.

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### Reference

1. A. Tucker, *Guardian*, 9 Sept. 1971, p. 4.

I have lived in Bloemfontein for the last 25 years as a Netherlands subject and a professor of botany. I do not wish to try to explain the extremely complicated racial situation in South Africa, which is different from that in many other countries (including the United States). I only wish to put on record that everybody in South Africa can express his views against apartheid in word and in writing without any fear. This is exactly what is being done daily in a number of newspapers, and scientists take a very active part in discussing, attacking, and supporting the government policy of apartheid. If scientists from outside South Africa take sides on this complicated issue they should at least check their facts. In the letter that was sent to the Smithsonian Institution, the statement "Any scientist speaking out against apartheid would be banned from the country if he were a foreigner and imprisoned if he were South African" most certainly does not conform to the basic requirement in science that facts must be stated accurately, honestly, and without bias.

I lived for 5 years under Nazi occupation and took an active part in opposing that system at the risk of my life. I know the difference between the freedom of speech and press in South Africa and the kind of serfdom where an opponent of the authorities is exterminated. I support freedom and happiness for every human being, whether he lives in Russia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, or other oppressed nations,

and I hope that our colleagues in those countries will soon have the same freedom to attack their government that scientists have in South Africa. We will not reach that happy state by writing emotional letters with distortions of fact and by misusing the cathedra of science.

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That "Any scientist speaking out against apartheid would be banned from the country if he were a foreigner and imprisoned if he were South African" is simply not so. In 1965, as a graduate student visiting South Africa, I spoke out vigorously against the government's apartheid policy, as do numerous South African politicians and scientists. At least one white South African professor I met often made his antiapartheid feelings a matter of public record in letters to the editor of a large Cape Town newspaper. Nearly all of the English-language newspapers had antiapartheid editorial policies. While the editors of these newspapers were subject to various forms of government harassment (a problem that is not peculiar to South Africa), they were allowed to continue to publish.

Thomas J. Cox's letter (3 Sept., p. 868) protesting the acceptance by *Science* of an advertisement from South Africa expresses a position with which I completely agree. I do not believe that it is morally defensible for the U.S. government or for private white U.S. citizens to support in any way those institutions in South Africa that would, by their segregated nature, subject both black U.S. citizens and black South Africans to constant insult and humiliation.

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## National Security and the Environment

Philip H. Abelson, in his editorial "Conservation and the minerals industry" (2 July, p. 9), discusses some of the difficulties that arise as we try to provide the materials necessary for a "satisfactory" standard of living, and, at the same time, attempt to minimize the adverse impact on the environment.