

Letters

Political Psychiatry

While the intent of the letter on political psychiatry by Watson *et al.* (23 Mar., p. 1184) may have been good, the content was not. They imply that political psychiatry is not and has not been used in the United States. Well-publicized cases in Mississippi come to mind, and an honest investigation would most likely discover many cases throughout the country. Political psychiatry is an international problem, and the solution is not advanced by cold war thinking on either side.

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Watson *et al.* raise the important question of the use of psychiatry to suppress political dissidents, and they refer to the case of Zhores Medvedev.

Medvedev's case is an important one, and it is worthy of the widest discussion. However, no reference to the Medvedev case is adequate if it does not simultaneously refer to the widespread and growing use of psychiatric techniques as tools of social control in the West. The issues raised by psychosurgery pose the question most sharply; it is now well known that in the United States, prisoners, notably black militants, have been "offered" as psychosurgical cases. Psychosurgeons have written books advocating the use of amygdectomy to control ghetto violence. Perhaps even more disturbing is the massive use of drugs, such as the amphetamine congener, Ritalin, to "cure" school children "suffering" from inattentiveness in class and disrespect for authority. Such children are being diagnosed as suffering from hyperkinesis or minimum brain dysfunction—so-called illnesses whose diagnostic signs are not neurological at all, but are purely associated with a child's social behavior patterns. Approximately 250,000 U.S. schoolchildren are estimated to be on daily doses of Ritalin, and it is noteworthy that "hyperkinesis" in this sense appears to be largely a U.S.

disease. The massive use of drugs, for the social control of schoolchildren at least, is not a European phenomenon.

There are many other examples of the use of psychiatric techniques for the manipulation of individuals and the suppression of social unrest; labeling a dissenter as mad and treating him accordingly may be more tolerant than putting him in prison, but it is no less repressive. Can we take it that Watson *et al.* will also protest these examples of "the prostitution of psychiatry as a means of suppressing political dissent"?

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Astronomy Funding at Universities

In 1972, U.S. astronomers, acting through the Astronomy Survey Committee, completed an in-depth assessment of the recent achievements of astronomy and outlined their scientific priorities for the 1970's. The results of this study, referred to as the Greenstein Report (1), provide the rationale not only for present levels of federal funding but also for future authorizations and appropriations to build and operate major new facilities. The Greenstein Report is also valuable because it provides the funding agencies and the Congress with a set of priorities agreed to with remarkable unanimity by the nation's astronomers.

The program having highest priority is, "A very large radio array, designed to attain resolution equivalent to that of a single radio telescope 26 miles in diameter; this should be accompanied by increased support of smaller radio programs and facilities at the universities or other smaller research laboratories." The first stage in funding for the Very Large Array has been achieved, and it is expected that this facility will be funded to a successful completion. It is not evident, however, that any parallel commitments have been made

to increase the support of university radio facilities.

The Astronomy Survey Committee lays great stress on the need for balance in planning expenditures for the future. They point out that the vitality of the U.S. astronomical effort originated in the universities, where most talented astronomers are located; that in order to continue the flow of young scientists, new scientific ideas, and technical innovations, the university-based scientists need adequate support; that a fruitful interplay between different styles of operation is possible only if healthy operating budgets exist at a variety of places. The report implies that the longer term success of the national centers will depend on the viability of their user constituencies.

The astronomy section of the National Science Foundation has been faced with the difficult task of funding more requests from a relatively stable budget. Hard choices have been made which have actually resulted in terminal grant awards to three radio observatories. Those university facilities which continue to produce excellent research should continue to receive adequate support on a local level, but serious thought should be given to combining some of the others as regionally managed, visitor-oriented facilities, in much the same way that the Northeast Radio Observatory Corporation has managed the Haystack facility in Massachusetts. The Greenstein Report certainly supplies ample justification for the support of such mini-consortia, and the advantages to be gained in the continuity of better, long-term management capability, visitor influx, and efficiency of operation make the concept of regional facilities for radio astronomy an attractive solution to some of these problems.

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References

1. Astronomy Survey Committee, *Astronomy and Astrophysics for the 1970's* (National Academy of Sciences-National Research Council, Washington, D.C., 1972).

NIH Grant Applications

Probably thousands of research investigators like myself have been trapped in the NIH (National Institutes of Health) budget squeeze. These men have labored over myriad grant applications and have seen them through to