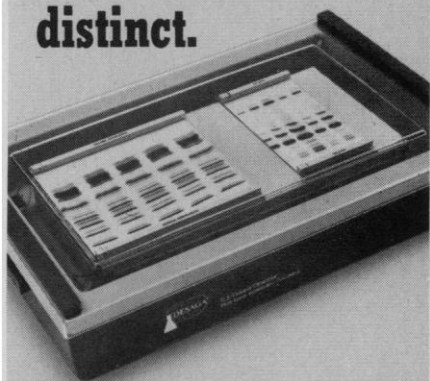


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## LETTERS

### Solar Energy

Philip H. Abelson's splendid editorial "Energy from biomass" (26 Mar., p. 1221) was encouraging to me, and I'm sure to many others. One begins to become a bit insecure about criticizing proponents of either conventional or breeder reactors. When one has suggested that coal, solar energy, geothermal energy, winds and tides, and perhaps, in a major way, conservation might alleviate mankind's hunger for ergs, even distinguished physicists and at least one former Atomic Energy Commission director suggest that signees of such statements of opinion on the nuclear power explosion and the impending plutonium economy are "knee-jerk liberals" who should stick to their knitting, be it biology, physics, chemistry, or any other narrow form of science. Abelson is joined by many concerned and well-informed persons who objectively estimate that the period 1985 to 1990 will see the end of supplies of easily accessible petroleum and high-grade uranium ore. Large petroleum corporations and electric power producers, at home and abroad, have already begun the conversion to nuclear fuel. A major solar energy effort by the government, and by the nation's scientific research centers, might just manage to unburden us, in a decade or so, of much of our heavy dependence on a nuclear future. It would also help assuage our concerns about long-term waste disposal, accidents in transportation and reprocessing of plutonium-enriched reactor products, and the inevitable diversion to weaponry.

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### Pakistan Plant Symposium

The first international symposium ever held in Pakistan took place 1 to 7 March in Lahore and was entitled Genetic Control of Diversity in Plants. The meeting was an attempt to bring together basic plant geneticists, biochemists, and molecular biologists with applied workers who are trying to improve crop plants, particularly those in the Orient. Perhaps the most important consequence of the meeting was the setting up of lines of communication between basic scientists from the West and applied scientists from Pakistan. For example, wheat breeders were to be seen

eagerly talking with wheat biochemists and experts on the nutritional aspects of wheat.

The chairman of the meeting was Amir Muhammed, vice-chancellor of the University of Agriculture, Lyallpur, Pakistan, long known in the West for his work on the enzymology of the photo-reactivating enzyme from yeast. The guiding spirit behind the organization was Alexander Hollaender, who has been a highly successful organizer of international symposia in a number of developing countries.

Among those who took part in the proceedings were Sir Otto Frankel from Australia, who made an effective plea for preservation of diverse genes in plant species used in agriculture and their wild relatives; Johanna Dobereiner from Brazil, who described her work on nitrogen fixation in grasses; Michael Gale from England, who gave a beautifully clear talk on the relationship between gibberellin insensitivity and dwarfism in wheat and how this could be used in breeding; and Hans Doll and Bjorn Eggum from Denmark, who spoke on the biochemistry and nutritional aspects of cereal proteins. R. C. von Borstel from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, will be responsible for editing the published volume of the meeting's proceedings.

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### Nuclear Power: How Do the People Decide?

Philip M. Boffey (News and Comment, 30 Jan., p. 360) notes that in at least eight states initiative measures to halt or postpone building of nuclear power plants are being or have been recently circulated and reports on legal issues raised over the division of authority between the federal and state governments with respect to matters of regulation of nuclear power reactors. The points raised in this useful article and elsewhere in *Science's* continued coverage of this significant issue of public policy are valid and important.

The increasing use of the ballot, either through referendum or initiative to deal with the complex issues involving the siting and regulation of nuclear power plants, raises not only the constitutional issues of division of powers between the federal government and the states, but also another issue of immense constitu-