

Annual Meeting—A Potpourri

Because the AAAS is an umbrella association encompassing most disciplines, its Annual Meeting seems to be a potpourri of science and technology. The latest meeting, held recently in Washington, D.C., was no exception. In addition to the diversity of subjects explored throughout the week, there often were incongruous juxtapositions of people, demonstrations, and events—little asides one sees but must hurry past.

While a paper on "The Limits of Nepotism" was being presented in one room, next door the topic was "Lab Workers' Hazards in Dealing with DNA"; "Physical and Mental Health Effects of Job Loss" was next door to "An Insect's Naked-Eye View of the World"; and "Economic Effects of Corrosion" was next to "The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence."

In a session on "The Civil Rights of the Handicapped," the audience listened attentively as speakers reviewed federal mandates to ensure equal opportunity for handicapped people. As if in testimony to the ability and interest of handicapped individuals to participate in educational events, wheelchairs, seeing-eye dogs, and "signers"—interpreters for the deaf—were much in evidence during this session and many others. Adjacent to the main registration area of the Sheraton-Park, the now-traditional Resource Center provided hospitality for handicapped meeting participants seeking and trading information.

The "Tools of Science" exposition in the exhibit hall of the Sheraton-Park Hotel housed 80 booths. This exhibition, like the meeting itself, represented an amalgam of interests. Highly technical exhibits such as an SAS-2 High Energy Gamma Ray telescope from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration competed for crowds with a display of the history of writing instruments. This latter exhibit featured antique to modern fountain pens and pencils and was put together by the National Science Foundation.

At the booth set up by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Beltsville Agri-

cultural Research Center, a new USDA device was used to demonstrate the fat content of different grades of ground beef from a local grocery chain. Providing a contrast was the next booth, which featured "Science Books from the Soviet Union." An arresting display of hypergraphic art, including rotating, three-dimensional sculptures which are viewed through colored filters, shadow sculptures, and serigraphs, brightened the exhibit hall and provided many visitors with their first look at these relatively new art forms.

Walking through the lobbies of the two meeting hotels, the Sheraton-Park and the Shoreham Americana, it was hard to tell anything out of the ordinary was going on most of the week. The large Sheraton-Park lobby was basically quiet. In contrast, the meeting registration areas were constantly alive early in the week with information seekers and registrants.

Following the tradition established at recent AAAS meetings, a few special interest groups set up tables in the hallways, but the mood was one of relatively quiet protest. A person who worked at one table complained that all she heard were queries regarding the location of the rest rooms. A panelist in the "Sociobiology" session was doused with water, and anti-nuclear placards and a heated rebuttal marked one of the public lectures. In general, however, audiences made it clear they had come to hear the speakers, and whether they agreed or disagreed, they wanted no disruptions.

Hundreds of reporters covered the meeting throughout the week. Some 30

press conferences were organized for the sessions and reporters scrambled to get private interviews with scientists, many of whom have become popular translators of science to the public. Stacks of scientific papers were carted away, for the expressed purpose of increasing the "public understanding of science." Climate, sociobiology, low-level radiation, DNA research, whistle-blowing, frontiers of astronomy, and scores of other topics were widely covered by the media in newspaper, radio, and television accounts.

In short, the 1978 AAAS Meeting did seem to provide "something for everyone." For the lay people who wandered through the exhibit hall, the high school students who served as session aides, the public which came to learn about whales or physics, the administrators and science policy-makers, as well as the "real" science practitioners, science and technology were made readily available—under one roof.

It made for an interesting week.

JOAN WRATHER
Executive Office

Moratorium on Nomination of AAAS Fellows

Should the rank of Fellow in the AAAS be continued? For decades, opinion within the Board and Council has been divided on this question. Proponents consider conferral of fellowship an appropriate way of recognizing members for work that is scientifically distinguished or socially highly significant. Opponents say fellowship is a hollow honor that has no place in a democratic organization such as the AAAS. Moreover, they criticize the selection criteria and the nomination procedures, and point to the uneven participation of the Sections in the nomination process. In 1977, seven of the 21 Sections did not submit nominations.

At a meeting on 16 February, the Council decided to put the question to the membership by straw ballot at the time of the 1978 election. If a clear majority votes for continuation of the fellowship program, Council will take up suggestions for improving the nomination process. If a clear majority votes

Retired?

AAAS offers a special dues rate of \$21 for retired members. For details, write or call AAAS, Membership Recruitment Office, 1776 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036 (telephone 202/467-4460).