Briefings

edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Creationist Writer Cries Foul

In an unusual gesture for a scientific organization, a committee of the AAAS has given qualified support to a religious fundamentalist named Forrest L. Mims III in his widely publicized dispute with *Scientific American*. Mims, a Texas writer, claims that his religious freedom was violated when the magazine withdrew an assignment last year after learning that he is a creationist.

Mims has sought support from several groups including the AAAS Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility. On 29 October, urban ecologist Sheldon Krimsky of Tufts, who chairs the committee, sent a letter to Mims which states emphatically that "a person's private behavior or religious or political beliefs or affiliations should not serve as criteria in the evaluation of articles submitted for publication." The letter adds, though, that the committee "is not taking any position on the particulars" of this fight.

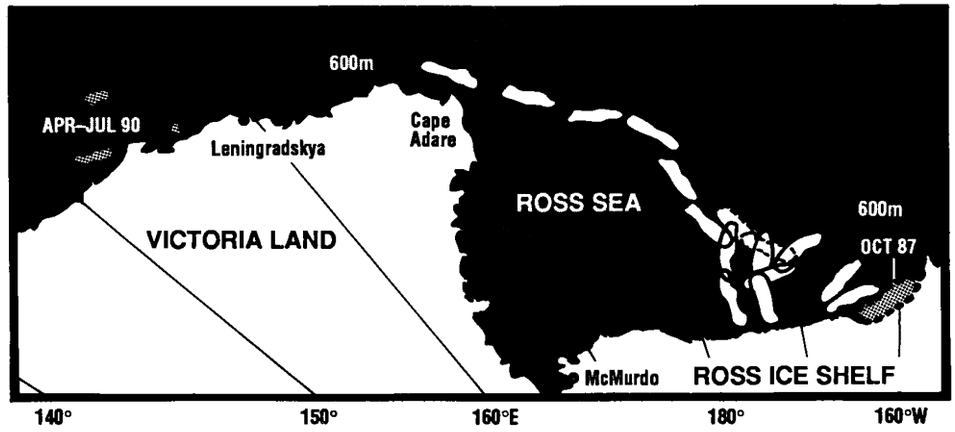
Houston Chronicle

Forrest L. Mims III

The dispute began after *Scientific American*'s editor, Jonathan Piel, selected and then rejected Mims, who does not have a science degree, as author of the magazine's "Amateur Scientist" column, which tells readers how to run home-made scientific experiments. Piel withdrew the offer, according to Mims, only after Mims disclosed under interrogation that he wrote for "Christian magazines" and did not believe in evolution. Mims says *Scientific American* wanted the right to censor his other writings, which he objected to, and that the editors finally told him they wanted to avoid the embarrassment of having a fundamentalist on the payroll.

Scientific American's executive editor, Allan Hall, says he's surprised by the furor because he thought the matter had been settled in an agreement signed by Mims last year. It stipulates that the magazine will publish and pay for three columns—which it has done—and that Mims in return will not file suit. As for the controversy, Hall says: "As far as we're concerned, the refusal to accept the theory of evolution is nonscientific thinking. The magazine has a right to select a staff that agrees with our basic idea of what science is."

Mims isn't letting the matter rest. He has managed to catch the ear of the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the Associated Press, all of whom have written stories about the incident. And he says he intends to appeal for support to the AAAS Council, an 83-member policy-making group.



Weekly satellite tracking over the past 3 years reveals the precise journey of an iceberg the size of Long Island, starting with its calving from Antarctica's Ross Ice Shelf until its breakup 1250 miles later. The giant chunk, named B-9, has eliminated the Bay of Whales and forced scientists to redraw maps of the Antarctic coastline. Scientists from Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Geological Observatory, the Navy/NOAA Joint Ice Center, and New Zealand tracked the breakaway berg in order to learn about the behavior of currents in the Ross Sea.

Employers Shun Genetic Screening

There has been "little or no growth" in the use of genetic monitoring or screening technologies in the workplace in the past 7 years, despite "impressive" improvements in such tests, according to a report from the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA).*

Genetic screening is a one-time test to identify inherited traits and diseases. Monitoring detects modifications to genetic material from workplace toxins and other factors. Both have been controversial from the beginning. Privacy advocates worry that information could be used to discriminate against employees, while health experts see it as potentially valuable in identifying workplace hazards as well as individual vulnerabilities.

Still, there has been a dearth of accepted guidelines for genetic testing. And in the face of a welter of onerous ethical dilemmas, new laws protecting workers from discrimination, and "legal questions of the most sensitive sort," reports the OTA, industry has shown little enthusiasm for genetic screening and monitoring programs.

According to a survey conducted last year, only 12 of 300 "Fortune 500" companies do genetic screening. One of the 12, a petroleum company, also does cytogenetic monitoring. OTA says its current survey reveals that even fewer companies anticipate future use of genetic technologies than they did in 1982.

The report was released by Senator Al Gore (D–Tenn.), who said "because this survey shows no significant change in use, there is still time" for Congress to sort out how genetic tests should be used.

*The report, "Genetic Monitoring and Screening in the Workplace," is available for $12 from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402–9325.

MIT's Davidson Heads Princeton Lab

Princeton University's Plasma Physics Laboratory has landed a new director, Massachusetts Institute of Technology physics professor Ronald Davidson. He takes over from physicist Harold Furth at a time when the laboratory and the rest of the fusion energy R&D program must endure sharp funding cutbacks.

Davidson says he is not discouraged despite the fact that one of his first duties will be to lay off a number of the laboratory's 786 employees. "Prince-