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LETTERS

Argonne: Hope for Revitalization

I was director of the Reactor Engineering Division at Argonne National Laboratory during the period when Argonne was perhaps the premier reactor development laboratory in the world. I therefore looked forward to John Walsh's article on Argonne (News and Comment, 22 Oct., p. 354) with considerable anticipation, hoping to read of some signs of revitalization in that program. However, I was disappointed. I am therefore moved to register some emeritus comments on this aspect of Argonne's work.

Two sentences of the article deserve juxtaposition: "Currently more than a third of lab resources go into the effort that emphasizes work on the fast breeder reactor," and "Federal agencies tended to regard the labs simply as contractors obligated to perform necessary R & D." Both statements are clearly true. Placed together, they are instructive as to why the fast breeder reactor program of the United States hasn't progressed very well—and, indeed, why the mission-oriented programs of all the national labs, except the weapons labs, have floundered.

For at least 15 years, the United States has been the victim of overmanaged bureaucracy in the conduct of applied nuclear work. It has been about that long since the Atomic Energy Commission and its successor agencies decided to run the programs with central direction from Washington and partitioned responsibility in the field. A fast breeder reactor program that had been launched at Argonne's initiative in 1948 and had succeeded in producing a reactor (EBR-II) that was the springboard for launching other countries' programs was thereupon broken up, and only fragments returned. The rest of the pieces were assigned to other organizations, and liaison was permitted only at the sufferance of, and direction of, Washington. This situation still prevails.

The result as it concerns Argonne has been large, but unstable, employment of its nuclear engineers and related scientists as tasks are assigned and withdrawn. A very talented pool of people remain, but they are underemployed as far as utilizing their talents for an integrated job of breeder reactor development. Their ability to capitalize on the serendipities that abound from their being associated with basic research scientists in related fields is virtually nil.

When this happens, both the labora-

tory and the mission suffer. As for Argonne's applied programs, no end of travail is in sight. The current state of our fast breeder reactors, as compared with those in France, tells the story of the mission. In these days of wondering about and searching for ways to move our country back into the forefront of technological production, the ability to use our national labs as prime instruments for progress remains neglected.

I am delighted to hear that Argonne's basic science component is coming out of the doldrums; but it won't be fulfilling its promise as a complete national laboratory until its applied component is given an integrated job to do. However, that can't happen unless the Department of Energy is forced to reestablish its role as moderator and mediator (between scientists and engineers on the one hand, and the instruments of the body politic on the other) and to forgo its current role of manager and director.

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Easing Nuclear Tensions

I commend *Science* for the publication of "Declaration of prevention of nuclear war" (29 Oct., p. 448) and Philip H. Abelson's editorial "Efforts to decrease nuclear tensions" (29 Oct., p. 427).

I am one who firmly believes in a freeze on the production of further nuclear weaponry followed by a programmed decrease in arsenals of these weapons, but only with an acceptable scheme for verification. Although, as Abelson points out, verification may be sticky, I nevertheless believe that it is achievable. An important and perhaps essential catalyst for nuclear disarmament must certainly be widespread "grass-roots" support in both the Soviet Union and the United States.

In the past decade and a half I have visited the Soviet Union eight times, most recently for 2 weeks in October–November 1981 and for 5 weeks in July–August 1982. There is no doubt in my mind that there is now a growing anxiety in the Soviet Union concerning the possibility of nuclear war. This is, in part, a result of constant reminders in the press and on radio and television that Brezhnev has proclaimed that the Soviet Union will not initiate a nuclear war but that no such proclamation has come from the United States. I have found great concern, but no animosity, about