



Viewpoint

A role in the world

One of the responsibilities of EPS is to ensure representation of the European physics community at international meetings for which physicists, and even national societies, might be ineligible. Whilst such meetings might appear remote from the primarily technical interests of individual physicists, often they arrive at policy decisions which determine the future direction of these interests.

Official Delegates of EPS report on two important meetings in this issue: firstly, D.J. Kroon (Eindhoven, The Netherlands) on the UN Conference on the Human Environment from 5-18 June 1972; and, secondly, G. Szigeti (Budapest) on the Unesco Meeting of Experts in Science Policy from European Member States from 4-7 July 1972.

D.J. Kroon outlines how physicists can help to implement the recommendations of the Stockholm Conference on which he reports. G. Szigeti was able to inform the Budapest meeting about the awareness within EPS of the relevance of issues of science policy, and to outline the discussion on this topic at the special session of the EPS Council in Oslo in March 1972 (3 3 (April 1972) 4,6,7). It is significant that, at the Unesco meeting which prepared recommendations on science policy for Ministers in European Member States, *EPS was the only scientific society represented.*

It is essential that EPS should continue to fulfill its basic purpose of promoting the advancement of physics in Europe and neighbouring countries by attending appropriate high-level discussions of science policy; in this way, EPS will be playing one of its roles in the world.

Science in Contemporary Society

E. H. S. Burhop

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Public attitudes toward science and technology have changed remarkably in recent years. Faced with evident and far reaching evil effects, both real and potential, of some aspects of modern technology, sections of the mass media and even some scientists have come to question the role of science. Despite the facts that 70% of the people of the world live in abject poverty, with an average income of less than 8% of that of the 30% who live in the industrially developed countries, and that they are only likely to raise themselves to a decent standard through the fuller application of science and technology, yet science is represented as a questionable and sometimes even sinister influence. What has led to this dramatic change in public attitudes and what must be done to combat it? These are pro-

blems to which I believe organizations of scientists should be giving urgent attention. The European Physical Society through its Advisory Committee on Physics and Society has indeed recognised the need for such discussions, but the activities of this Committee should be pursued more vigorously, and should deal with much more fundamental aspects of the problems than they have tackled so far.

There is no doubt that our technological civilization is facing a crisis and that it is related to the economic growth that modern science and technology have made possible.

Last year, six outstanding biologists issued a statement that has become known as the Menton statement and has since been signed by 2100 scientists and public figures in 23 countries. It sets out in concise terms areas in which this crisis confronts us: environmental deterioration; depletion of natural resources; population; overcrowding; and hunger. Estimates of the immediacy of the crisis vary. Paul Ehrlich expects major environmental catastrophes in the 1970s, and some predict chronic deprivation caused by overpopulation by the end of this century. Others predict the real crisis will come somewhat later. Even on the most optimistic forecast, supposing that every square meter of arable land is farmed with the highest yield cereal, Norman Borlaug, architect of the Green Revolution, estimates the maximum number of people that can be fed is 5×10^{10} . At the present rate of population increase, this number will be reached before the year 2100.

The Menton statement could have gone on to refer to the area of most immediate crisis of all arising from the continuing and escalating arms race,

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