

Dear Franklin...

It would be easy to get the impression that Joseph John Thomson discovered the electron... Irish physicists point to George Stoney... But he had in mind an elementary quantum of charge rather than a particle. The French give some precedence to Jean Baptiste Perrin... Others might claim that the Zeeman effect...gave a measurement of e/m of comparable accuracy to that of Thomson. Then there were Wiechert and Kaufmann. ...the electron was *dans le vent* in more places than the Cavendish Laboratory by the time Thomson did his experiment.

Those fortunate enough to teach undergraduates have to be ruthless in simplifying history... Such surgery, when applied to the tangled tales of research, is acceptable so long as it does not have a persistent bias. *Franklin, July/August 1997*

Your [article] is certainly correct and provocative for the 'standard physicists' (the good ones no doubt would easily agree). I would like to add that giving up the complexities of research in teaching is like selling a faulty product: that is, it hides the very best part of physics. Learning (and immediately forgetting) algorithms does not have, in my view, any cultural value for students, and deprives physics (and science in general) from influencing culture at large (the public image of physics is largely connected to technological applications). The history for education conferences of the EPS history group are dedicated to these problems.

Fabio Bevilacqua
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Franklin has no criticism of the way [Alun Jones] has run the IoP. But [Alun Jones] is a member of a prestigious men-only club, and Franklin thinks this is not commensurate with running an organisation with an equal opportunities policy. It's simply that [Alun Jones] spends some of his time in an environment in which there are more opportunities if you are male. A too Victorian way of life. *Franklin September/December 1997*

No, I definitely do not agree with you. I think your piece is a disgusting example of 'Zeitgeist'. I am absolutely in favor of hiring and firing according to 'equal opportunity' if this phrase means: without regard of gender, and not, as it is sometimes under-

stood nowadays (again: Zeitgeist), preferring women without regard of ability. But there is no rational argument why there should not be a club (private, that is) for gentlemen only which upholds Victorian traditions to the point. Ladies are free to establish their own club of name, say, Apollonaeum, which is for ladies only and excludes men. The only issue for which Alun Jones needs reprehension is that he did not speak out freely about his club and told you what I am telling you here. But, probably, he suffered already from what we called in Germany 'Gesinnungsterror' and for which your piece is an example.

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I do certainly not agree with you. It is perfectly possible for a man to belong to a gentlemen only club, or for a lady to belong to a lady's only club (and yes they do also exist) and still believe in an equal opportunities environment. I have heard that certain physicists play football and nobody has ever questioned their ability to believe in an equal opportunities environment (and football teams happen also to be all male). This also applies to women playing in all female volleyball teams etc. I think that it is about time to stop sacrificing every single tradition just for the joy of being politically correct.

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No, I do not agree with Franklin. If the Athenaeum gentlemen wish to stay for themselves, why don't you just let them alone? If I were a woman I should not want to join this exclusive club, but would rather found a different one where I could be together with people who think the same way as myself (exclusively or not). Apparently, this is what happened when Faraday *et al* had felt the need in founding the Athenaeum against Banks *et al* of the Royal Society. Why this forcing into 'political correctness' by any means? I understand, the Athenaeum is a *private* club and, in this sense, "my house is my castle" isn't it? If people (even great physicists) wish to stay Victorian, let them be happy this way; you don't have to agree but nobody obliges you to mix either. There are so many grave subjects to discuss and try to resolve—the jobless young physicists in the West, or the breaking down of research in the countries

of the former Soviet Union, or even the question why there are so few women physicists around (because of Athenaeum?) – that I find the jokes *a la* Franklin at least taking too much space.

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It was an interesting article on the history of the Athenaeum but I would have chosen a more appropriate source than *Europhysics News* from which to criticise someone's personal life. Neither can I make sense of the actual criticism. It is not in the environment of the Athenaeum where 'there are more opportunities if you are male' (to be precise, there are only males there to take whatever opportunities are on offer). We all spend some of our time in an environment in which being male offers more opportunities. Does Franklin really consider that the possibility of joining the Athenaeum is one of the opportunities that women miss?

Ian Malcolm
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I disagree strongly with Franklin. As a New Zealander I am not impressed by the kind of snobbery associated with these clubs and personally wouldn't want to join one. But that is not the issue here. What I reject utterly is the logic in the last paragraph. The issue should be whether Alun Jones is making a good job of running the IoP. If he is, then that is what counts. Personal friendships and opinions and life styles are personal matters if they do not impinge on the job at hand. I reject the illiberal attitude that demands other people think just as oneself does. I suffered that kind of pressure as a child in Nazi Germany, and then as a teenager in quite a different way in a small rural community in New Zealand where also everyone had to conform, and the attitude of Franklin is of exactly the same type; everyone is supposed to think the same way as (s)he does. What I admire so about Britain, and which has been to a considerable extent the reason for my spending my working life there, is the liberal attitude that people can be different and the good things that they contribute are valued and accepted.

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No offence, or criticism of an individual, is intended by Franklin

A New Role for Press Officers

Or a New Meaning for Spin?

Last Autumn, two days before the British government revealed its plans for the coming year's budget, the chancellor of the exchequer, Gordon Brown, who was to deliver the plans to parliament, was seen with his girlfriend in a London restaurant. In fact, he was caught in the act by a photographer and a photograph of the couple appeared in the News of the World, a British tabloid newspaper. There had been rumours about the romance; now the British tabloid-reading public, who like to know this sort of thing about their politicians, could be certain.

The photograph was not down to the luck of the photographer, Franklin can reveal. It had been arranged by Brown's press secretary, the sly Charlie Whelan. It was a way of showing British tax payers that the chancellor was not austere, but very likeable. This was to be his first ever budget speech, and the Labour Party's first budget-plan in 18 years, and the photograph helped ease its reception.

The stunt is reminiscent of Bill Clinton's appearance on American television in the early days of his presidential career playing Heartbreak Hotel on the saxophone. It was again, arranged by press secretaries. Acknowledging Clinton's reputation as a lightweight President, his press advisors turned this into a ratings winner by putting him on television.

Clinton's press advisors – Dick Morris, James Carville and George Stephanopoulos – have almost become legends in modern politics. They, and their fellow press manipulators, are known as 'spin doctors' – a combination of 'witch-doctor' and the 'spin' used by baseball players – because they fine tune speeches and time appearances to maximise the popularity of their political masters. They are simply specialists hired to deal with the press. But in Britain the New Labour government, perhaps Europe's most modern government in media terms, uses them unashamedly.

In America's political history, more examples are Michael Deaver, who saved Ronald Reagan's popularity by keeping him away from speeches and concentrating on photo-opportunities; and Ted Sorenson and Pierre Salinger, who created the Camelot myth for Kennedy. Franklin has been wondering what a spin doctor would

do for the European physics community. There is no question of arranging for the new director general of CERN to be photographed with a girlfriend in a restaurant. But there are sober alternatives. Spin in physics could take on a new meaning.

An EPS spin doctor would be very much pro-physics. He or she would develop contacts in the media, and he or she would ensure that whenever a physicist appeared on television, it was a physicist hopefully tied to EPS. Some EPS members would receive training in dealing with the press. The spin doctor would show physicists how to respond to difficult questions, like, Why should money be spent on facilities like CERN?

A spin doctor would fine tune and disseminate to the press the opinion of physicists on global warming; he or she would send to journalists directories of physicists who have agreed to accept questions from the press (just as some British universities do for their academics). The best spin doctor would make physicists better known by getting them greater media coverage, and accomplish perhaps the most difficult task of all: just as Deaver made Reagan popular, a spin doctor would improve the public image of the European physicist.

All this is not so distant from reality. Big projects (CERN, Jet) already have press officers. But a shift in their role could take place. CERN's already excellent publicity officials could be writing speeches for their director general, rather than writing press releases and the CERN bulletin.

Good spin doctoring would place EPS closer to government. Once EPS physicists were better known, governments would be more likely to choose them as advisors (Britain's Labour government chose the intelligent and media-friendly Robert May, a life scientist.)

Britain's political spin doctors often receive criticism for being 'economical with the truth', a euphemism for lying in British politics. Most of the time, a spin doctor simply presents the best side of the truth.

No-one, for instance, would tell a minister that we need CERN because particle physics is our *raison d'être* and we enjoy doing physics this way. The truths we choose are: CERN is a European university, that its technological spin-offs contribute to society, that understanding the world is an immense achievement. Other ways of presenting the truth, selected by a spin doctor, would help enormously here.

Do you agree with Franklin? Yes or no, send your opinion to eneditor@univ-mulhouse.fr, or c/o Editor, EPS Secretariat, BP 2136, F-68060

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