

ANALYTICALLY SPEAKING

The column of our corresponding editor

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SOCIAL STUDIES OF SCIENCE AND US. I.

A father when asked whath his son was studying at college replied, "Nothing, they're studying him." At Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University /VPI and SU/ the first weekend in November we could have been that boy. The occasion was the Annual Meeting of the Society for Social Studies of Science /4S/, and of course the studies weren't of any of us personally, but rather of scientists and engineers in general. There was much ado about nuclear science, chemists and physicists and a good bit of it struck pretty close to home. So perhaps other radioanalytical chemists can also find some communality of interest in the matter discussed.

*Research sponsored by the Office of Energy Research, U.S. Department of Energy under contract W-7405-eng-26 with the Union Carbide Corporation.

VPI and SU, located at Blacksburg in the mountains of Virginia, hosted this year's meeting. The school has a Center for the Study of Science in Society, and two volumes of Working Papers have already been published. The strong program there was probably a major reason for the meeting location. Volume 1 of the Working Papers has two articles of interest to us: "Nuclear Fear: A Preliminary History" and "Moral Choices for Engineers." Vol. 2 is titled "The Demarcation Between Science and Pseudo-Science" and covers subjects ranging from pure philosophy to the Loch Ness Monster, UFO's and parapsychology.

The 4S meeting was 2-1/2 days of dual sessions and panel discussions including one evening session and screening of a new documentary film about nuclear weapons and foreign policy. I will cover here only some of the highlights that may appeal to us radioactive types.

Almost the very first sentence I heard in the session "Career Contingencies and Problems Choice in Science" was, "What is the difference between social science and physical sciences?" He then went on to describe one: a question was posed to a number of sociologists - What article was bogus in a certain issue of the American Journal of Sociology? There were many answers picking out a number of articles; all answers were wrong. The journal issue itself was months old and no one had challenged the article. This, the speaker said, would never happen in physical science. Or would it?

Susan Cozzens of the National Science Foundation discussed problem sets and choices. She cites an actual incident in biochemical research in which an argument broke out over priority rights to a discovery. She kept names and exact details secret, but she provided graphs to show the research interests and papers of the three claimants. Two she classified as hedgehogs: scientists who