



20-27 December 1979

Into the 1980s

CHANGES of Editor at *Nature* are relatively rare: my departure at the end of 1979 will only be the fifth such change in 110 years (admittedly the figures are somewhat distorted by the extraordinary 50 years which the first editor, Sir Norman Lockyer, served). A new editor has yet to be appointed; for the interim Peter Newmark, at present Deputy Editor, will take over. Dr Newmark has had overall responsibility for the selection of biological manuscripts for almost six years and has done this job with distinction. *Nature* will be in excellent hands.

The production of the journal, week by week, year by year, is a collaborative enterprise involving a wide variety of people. It requires the continuing support and encouragement of the board of directors; it requires the endless attention to detail of typesetters, printers and blockmakers; it requires the enthusiasm of advertising, promotion and circulation departments; it requires a lot of hard work from our secretarial and artwork teams. For this I have good cause to be very grateful. And yet my most profound thanks must go to the two groups of people, one small, one large, which between them ensure the continuing vitality of the journal: the editorial staff and a small army of outside helpers.

Tributes to staff can so easily be perfunctory; this one is very heartfelt. My fifteen colleagues who between them decide what goes into the journal, when and how, are a quite outstanding and thoroughly professional team, whose clear appreciation of what *Nature* ought to be and how *Nature* ought to change has been a constant support to me. Maintaining *Nature*'s standards calls for a particularly high degree of dedication to work which can at times be exceptionally onerous. The editorial team possesses this dedication in great measure.

And yet all the in-house ability would count for nothing if we could not depend on scientists from all disciplines and all parts of the world for willing help. One of the interesting things about *Nature*, is that this week's reader may be next week's author, adviser, referee or correspondent. The journal belongs more to a community than to a company, an editor or an editorial team. And without the continued encouragement, help and criticism we get from the scientific community, the journal could not survive. We thank you, the scientist, even though occasionally we choose to ignore your advice or refuse to publish your contribution!

ALL manner of scientific and science-political themes rise and fall during an editor's tenure, and perhaps it is foolish

to single one out for a last comment. After all reams could be written about the growth of public participation in science-policymaking, the problems of a career structure for scientists, the growing awareness of the vulnerability of the scientist to human rights violations, the place of scientists in development, risks to science funding in a weak economy and so on. Yet if there is one issue which consistently fails to capture headlines yet which ought to interest the scientific community, it is that of arms control and disarmament.

The 1970s has not been a hopeful decade. SALT 2, still not ratified, took an extraordinary time to negotiate and, as far as one can see, does little but confirm existing levels. And in order to sell SALT to the American people, other vigorous armaments programmes are promised. A comprehensive test ban treaty, on which hopes were raised recently, is now unlikely to appear in the near future; if ever it does emerge it is going to be so circumscribed as to be meaningless. The Non-Proliferation Treaty, due for review in 1980, has acquired few new signatories whilst a novel brand of proliferation has emerged, as practised by Israel, South Africa and Pakistan — proliferation by assumption. Multilateral Balanced Force Reduction talks in Vienna are hopelessly bogged down.

There is little progress towards a chemical weapons treaty, whilst there are growing fears of chemical rearmament. Meanwhile arms sales to the developing world continue with the utmost vigour, and nuclear nations improve their arsenals not so much quantitatively but qualitatively. And new weapons, such as laser and particle-beam devices against ballistic missiles get expanded research budgets, regardless of the enormous difficulties there will be in converting ideas into hardware.

Scientists should have a lot to say, and publicly, about the technological arms race. After all in most countries ministries of defence are the nation's largest single employers of scientists and technologists. And yet in recent years the enthusiasm that there once was for asking pointed questions on the assumptions behind military expenditure has largely dissipated — no doubt because of the thankless nature of the task and the seeming impossibility of deflecting inexorable trends.

Will any measures of real self-restraint emerge in SALT 3? Are nuclear weapons bound to spread indefinitely? Is there no way of diverting the resources devoted to military purposes into more constructive channels? These are questions for the 1980s . . . and beyond.

David Davies.