

LETTERS

CA efficiency challenged

Dear Sir

Obviously, Alfred Feldman (*C&EN*, Jan. 9, page 6) has struck an open nerve. Fred Tate's "rebuttal" is trivial and skirts the main issue raised in Feldman's discussion of Ben Weil's earlier communication (*C&EN*, Sept. 16, 1966, page 6).

As Garfield stated in "The Role of Government, Professional Groups, and Private Enterprise in Science Communication," a paper recently presented before the Scientific and Technical Communications Committee of the National Academy of Sciences (SATCOM), a steam-roller tactic was employed to install the Chemical Abstracts Service as a national chemical information system, simply, as Feldman says, because they have had half a century of experience in producing abstracts but which "does not necessarily develop competence for planning and implementing a national system."

In an attempt to rationalize the manifest shortcomings of *Chemical Abstracts*, Tate has made the laughable claim that "CA is far more current than any major information service operating in the scientific and technical fields, and it is also more current than the smaller specialized services which operate in these fields, be they private enterprise or government-sponsored."

We do not know what supporting data he has in mind, but a study supported by the National Science Foundation showed that, in 1961, the average *abstracting* time lag in *Chemical Abstracts* was 26.8 weeks as compared to 7.9 weeks for *Index Chemicus*. In the same study, *Physics Abstracts* averaged 21.1 weeks lag time. If availability of formula indexes is then taken into account, at least an average of six months must be added to the *CA indexing* time lag. As far as indexing time lags in *really* large services are concerned, the annual 1965 *Science Citation Index* was delivered April 16, 1966. It indexed about 50% more items than *CA* in the same period. The

second half of the 1965 *GA* indexes arrived Dec. 1, 1966. In addition, the data covered in the 1965 *Chemical Abstracts Index* were published originally in the last third of 1964 and the first two thirds of 1965, while the 1965 annual *SCI* is a calendar year index covering data published in the same year. On a not insignificant number of occasions, the combined indexing-abstracting time lags for specific articles covered by *Chemical Abstracts* has been two or more years.

For the past decade or more, *Chemical Abstracts* has been held up as the paragon of indexing and abstracting services. A myth has been perpetuated that somehow the chemical world could not survive without it. Feldman has had the courage to challenge this specious argument.

Tate claims that the proposed registry system of CAS “has been acclaimed as a breakthrough in handling structural data.” He does not provide documentation, nor does he tell us what it will cost.

The members of the American Chemical Society, chemical industry, and the public at large should perhaps ask: Does any one organization have a monopoly on good ideas? Should an activity be perpetuated simply because it is operated by a nonprofit organization or a professional society? To what extent does the presence of the subsidized monolith stifle the evolution of improved services to those who actually need and use the scientific literature?

While Dr. Feldman may have erred with respect to a few minor details he should be congratulated for having the courage to take on the powerful CAS lobby singlehanded. We need more courageous individuals like him and less of monoliths.

All of the undersigned are members of the American Chemical Society.

EUGENE GARFIELD
I.H. SHER
G. H. FOEMAN
G.S. REVESZ
MICHAEL J. ROMANEC
ANDREA WARNER
MARTHA MCKINNEY
Philadelphia, Pa.

Rebuttal

Dear Sir:

The opinions of Dr. Garfield and his staff are clearly stated and I, though of a different mind, do not wish to quarrel with them here. However, their facts are a little skewed and with these I take issue.

His 1961 study which he cites in discussing currency has several notable shortcomings. First, the study report bears the distinction, very unusual as I understand it, of carrying an NSF-attached disclaimer. Second, our review of the report showed it contained very considerable inaccuracies with regard to information identified with *Chemical Abstracts*. Third, whatever the data, they are sadly out of date with regard to both *CA* and Garfield's publication. The 1966 data supporting the currency statements in my recent letter to the editor of *C&EN* were obtained from a continuing statistically designed sampling operation through which *CAS* compares the timeliness of its services with other secondary services. It should be noted that the data I cited are based on the interval between the date on the cover of the primary journal and that on the issue of the secondary service being compared. The most recent data from this currency review operation are never more than three months old.

As examination shows, *CA*'s abstracts with keyword subject indexes, author indexes, and numerical patent and patent concordance indexes generally appear more promptly than does the *Science Citation Index (SCI)* coverage of the corresponding primary literature. This point is, however, in my view not particularly relevant. *SCI* is a valuable addition to the community's information stable. *SCI* and *CA* are designed to serve different user needs; both are presumably useful, often, also presumably, in conjunction with one another.

FRED A. TATE
Columbus, Ohio