

COMMISSION 6: ASTRONOMICAL TELEGRAMS (TÉLÉGRAMMES ASTRONOMIQUES)

Report of Meeting, 15 August 1979

PRESIDENT: E. Roemer.

SECRETARY: B. G. Marsden.

After welcoming those in attendance, the President asked for any comments regarding the Report of the Commission. There were none. She then asked for confirmation of the nominations for officers of the Commission during 1979-82: President, J. Hers; Vice President, M. P. Candy. It was noted that the Commission has no Organizing Committee. These nominations were accepted unanimously. No changes were proposed in the general membership of the Commission.

The President reported that, in consultation with the Director of the Telegram Bureau, she had requested a small increase in the IAU subvention for the Central Bureau for Astronomical Telegrams and had defended the importance of the subvention, even though it represents only a small fraction of the annual operating budget of the Central Bureau. [The Finance Committee subsequently approved the proposed amount of S Fr. 5700. for the 1979-82 triennium.]

The Secretary, in his capacity as Director of the Central Bureau for Astronomical Telegrams, then briefly summarized the report, given in IAU Trans. XVIIIA, of the Bureau's activities during the triennium 1976-79. He pointed out in particular the fact that telegraphic communication was now handled using a pair of TWX machines owned by the Bureau; that line charges were levied on many of the items published on the IAU Circulars; and that his assumption in 1978 of the Directorship of the IAU Minor Planet Center had enabled the Bureau to operate more efficiently, much of the information--on both comets and minor planets--that had previously been published on the IAU Circulars being published instead on the Minor Planet Circulars. Since the report was written there had been a change of computers at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory; this had necessitated a threefold increase in the Bureau's budget for computing. The principal operational problem was that of assuring that communications would be received and acted upon in an appropriate manner when the Director was away from Cambridge. Enthusiastic and valuable assistance had been received from Daniel W. E. Green, who was attending to the Bureau's business singlehandedly during the ten days of the IAU meetings, but such student help was available during only part of the year, and, because of inevitably limited experience, there would always be some question as to the decision-making capacity of any student assistant.

The Secretary then reported on behalf of the ad hoc committee appointed at the 1976 meeting of the Commission. This committee had been appointed to examine whether there might be more appropriate media for the publication of many of the short observational notes that were not obviously related to objects or events in really urgent need of observation, but where publication in one of the conventional astronomical journals would be inappropriate or would involve an unacceptable delay. The action of Astronomy and Astrophysics, which has introduced a Letters section using camera-ready material provided by the authors, was regarded as a step in the right direction, but the final distribution of the Letters section was still dependent on the printing, addressing and mailing (generally by surface mail outside of Europe) of the rest of the journal. Preparation of a common set of such pages for incorporation in a number of the leading national journals was perhaps worthy of consideration but difficult to put into practice; in any case, several journals, particularly those for which the American Astronomical Society is responsible,

insist that full refereeing, rather than a quick screening for obvious errors, was necessary in order to maintain standards. Actually, much of the material appearing on the IAU Circulars is checked more completely than may be generally realized, and it was therefore decided to continue to publish as at present, but to levy line charges on all items relating to observations at other than optical wavelengths and on those relating to optical observations other than discovery announcements of comets, unusual minor planets, novae and supernovae and necessary follow-up information. Such charges help maintain subscription costs to the Circulars at a low level. This is an important consideration, for perhaps half of the subscribers are nonprofessional astronomers with no particular interest in much of the current astrophysical research.

After some discussion on the two preceding reports, the Commission recognized that, while the situation was perhaps not ideal, the Central Bureau did accomplish its essential work well, and that while the Bureau's Director was aware of potential difficulties, the financial support derived from line charges had in fact become an important factor in the continuing smooth operation of the Bureau.

The final item of business concerned proposed changes in the telegraphic code. Since it was planned to reprint the code in an updated "Astronomer's Handbook" section in IAU Trans. XVIIIB, an opportunity existed to incorporate revisions in the code. One specific proposal, involving an extension of the code to permit the specification of type of magnitude over a wide range of effective wavelengths, had been circulated to Commission members before the General Assembly. Comments about this proposal, and suggestions for any other changes, were to be reviewed by the Director of the Central Bureau following the closing date of 1 October 1979.

The retiring President then extended good wishes to the incoming President, J. Hers, who had served the Commission well as Vice President during two separate terms. The meeting was adjourned following an exchange of compliments between the retiring President and the Director of the Central Bureau.