Correspondence

The Journal

MAY I please take up Prof. Baxter's invitation to comment on his Editorial in the March issue?

The rôle of the JOURNAL should be primarily to record the proceedings of the Society. "Country" members cannot in general attend many London, or other provincial "Main" lectures, and indeed a London member may not be able to attend a particular meeting, so that unless *all* lectures and discussions, including those of Sections and Groups, are printed (if only in summarised form) they are lost to the Society as a whole.

If to do this would crowd out other papers and Technical Notes, then I would suggest that the AERONAUTICAL QUARTERLY and the technical and scientific press are the natural place for them—unless they are particularly intended to invite discussions by correspondence.

Yes! I think the Society should not confine itself too narrowly, to purely technical or scientific aspects; management and technical *policy* are a vital part of aeronautics today.

If it is not going too far from the limits of the Editorial, may I applaud the spirit of the footnote on p 390 (March JOURNAL)? When speakers in even more august assemblies have to submit to their utterances being published directly from the immediate recordings, why should speakers at lectures and conference sessions have any different treatment? Those weighty bound Proceedings appearing three years after the event are usually, for the greater part, just so much waste paper!

R. K. PAGE (*Associate Fellow*).

4th April 1966.

POOR old editor, he (or she) does get loaded with some heavy cans to carry!

It is obviously difficult for you to answer some of the comparatively vicious criticism levelled at you in the correspondence columns of the May issue so, as editorial consultant of a technical journal myself, may I jump in and put a point of view which may well offend some of your contributors.

One of these attacks was on the delay between the receipt of manuscript and publication, averaging apparently five months. Since most engineers are lacking in any knowledge of how a magazine is produced, may I point out that, at best, the process, physically, takes one month. Copy, even when approved (I'll deal with that later) has to be type-set. Galley proofs have to be read and corrected and returned to the printer. Illustrations require blocks to be made and proofs approved. And often the illustrations are so poor that artwork has to be done before they are fit for use, anyway.

Then the galleys have to be cut to size and fitted, with the block pulls, on to dummy pages, with some consideration for appearance. Page proofs are next prepared and these have to be checked just as carefully as everything else before passing them back to the printer for final production. Alongside this is the chasing of advertisers for their copy—and they often make changes at the last moment.

A newspaper is a whole company geared to produce nothing but that newspaper. Journals are almost always printed outside and, by an unhappy coincidence, the printer is usually overloaded with work. And the editorial staff is always at an absolute minimum.

So much for the mechanical problems; if that were all, the editor's life would be bearable. Unfortunately, in the case of highly technical journals, it isn't all.

Engineers, and scientists generally, are usually clever men, much cleverer in fact than the average editor. But technical ability and the power to create interesting prose seldom go together so the result, when one of these learned gentlemen wants to burst into print with his new formula or his appraisal of some old concept in modern application, is usually a document of anything up to 10 000 words, often accompanied by a collection of sketches on the backs of envelopes. Alternatively, there are nearly as many illustrations as there are words and that's when the editor really gets down to it. (It is also quite common for these wordy expositions to be sectionally numbered, sub-sectionally numbered, paragraph numbered, littered with cross-references and looking generally like some report of a Royal Commission. And it's worth adding that manuscript often arrives in longhand which has to be laboriously typed before it can be read with ease, let alone presented to some unfortunate compositor for type-setting).

The next stage is to decide whether to publish or not—after suitable cutting and editing. Journals of learned societies usually have an editorial committee, all of whom may wish to read the work. That takes time as the members have other commitments.

However, in due time a decision is reached and the editor is told to get the story cut down to half its length and keep the block costs to a reasonable minimum. That involves finding the author who, in the transport business, may well be on the other side of the world. When found, he has to be approached with the skill of a diplomat and persuaded to reshape his effusion.

Naturally, this takes time but it never absolves the editor from doing a vast amount of "subbing" because the author has either flatly refused to conform to the style of the journal or, worse, has spelt "realize" with a "z"' and "organise" with an "s" all the way through.

By the time the manuscript has reached finality months have gone by but, by an unhappy coincidence, the next two issues are "specials", quite unsuitable to include Mr. X's discussion of some totally different subject, so the article has to wait.

So five months isn't all that unreasonable and most of the blame lies with the writers who are (*a*) firmly convinced they are heaven-sent authors, (*b*) obsessed with the idea that all the readers will lap up and understand their abstruse mathematics and (*c*) unable to understand that an article in a journal is quite different from a patent specification. It is worth adding (*d*) that some of them cannot spell.

And when the article does finally appear in print the author nearly always complains about the type faces and the size of the illustrations, being, apparently, completely unaware that paper costs money and, within reason, must be used economically. Yet the same person would raise the roof if his design staff used two $\frac{1}{4}''$ Whitworth bolts where one would do.

Authors might also remember that they are usually specialists. The editor is expected to know all the answers for every technical subject under the sun. Unfortunately he does not so he has to consult other authorities. And that takes time, too.

So pity the poor editor. He, or she, tries to satisfy everybody and usually finishes by pleasing none.

BASIL CLARKE, *Editorial Consultant—Tech Air.*

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