



# LASER

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*Magna est veritas et praevallet*

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## FROM THE CHAIR

By Al Seckel, Chairperson

201:1

SCS is now the fastest-growing affiliate of CSICOP in the world. With a little over five months behind us we have already achieved a membership which is rapidly approaching 600, been reported about favorably in almost every major newspaper in the country, and have been interviewed at length on over 50 radio talk shows all across the country. The requests for us to speak to newspapers, radio and television shows, club banquets, and schools are continuing to flow in at an impressive rate.

Aside from all the very nice letters that we have received from doctors, college professors, psychologists and high school science teachers, thanking us for our existence, we have received many letters and phone calls from people who were believers who changed their minds after hearing a little common sense from us. One man, for example, who had been attending one of the local firewalking seminars read about our explanation in his local newspaper and called to thank us profusely for setting him straight. As I said in my last column, "People want to know and they want to know the correct answers."

We are not, however, entirely successful. We never thought we would be! In a sense we are like Sisyphus pushing that rock up the proverbial mountain of superstition only to watch it roll back down on occasion. A week after a lengthy article appeared about us in the Herald Examiner, they published an equally lengthy article about a woman who edits a magazine that has articles contributed exclusively by ghosts. I wonder which is the better buy - their magazine which tells you, for \$25, that there are ghosts, or our journal, for \$15.00, that tells you why there are no ghosts. Nevertheless we have our successes, so we will continue to keep pushing that rock up the hill.

SCS can be still more effective. We need to better focus our efforts. Right now we have a few good people doing an enormous amount of work. We need your help - volunteer, financial and otherwise. Please contact us. There is a lot to do.

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

June 2nd. (Sunday) 2 p.m. SCS General meeting. Former Columbia psychologist H. Scot Rogosin will discuss "The History of ESP Research in America and Abroad." Baxter Lecture Hall, Caltech, Pasadena. Free and open to the public. Information: 213-540-0915

June 8th (Saturday) 7:30 - 8:00 a.m. SCS board members Dr. Ronald Corwley and Al Seckel will appear on the television show "Youth and the Issues" and discuss pseudoscience.

June 28-29 (Friday and Saturday) All day. 1985 CSICOP International Conference at University College, London, England. Among the topics to be discussed will be ESP and Parapsychology, Paranormal Health Claims, UFOs, Astrology, Psychic Detectives, the Loch Ness Monster, and Firewalking. The speakers will be James Alcock, Ronald Binns, Jeremy Cherfas, Bernard Dixon, Ken Frazier, C.E.M. Hansel, Melvin Harris, Ray Hyman, Phillip Klass, Paul Kurtz, Graham Massey, James Randi, Ian Ridpath, Karl Sabbagh, Christopher Scott, and Al Seckel.

For further details contact Mary Rose Hays, CSICOP P.O. Box 229 Central Park Station, Buffalo, New York, 14215 (716-834-3222)

July - No general SCS meeting. Even skeptics need a vacation!

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## SCS RADIO SERIES

SCS hopes to have a regular weekly hour radio program on KPFK (90.7 FM) starting in the fall. To secure this program we need your help! Please call or write the station and tell them that you would like to see a regular program with SCS. It would only take a minute or so of your time. When we get this program we will reach thousands of people every week. KPFK judges programs by the response they get. So please call. If SCS members won't call, who will?

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The Southern California Skeptics is a non-profit organization. All board members and LASER staff are strictly voluntary. Any contributions to further this educational cause are welcome. Any donation of services or funds may be made by calling 213-540-0915 or writing to Post Office Box 7000-39, Redondo Beach, CA 90277. If you enjoyed this newsletter, please share it with a friend.





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It is better to light one candle  
than to curse the darkness.

## From the Chair

by Elie A. Shneour, Ph.D.

Most readers of *LASER* are conscious of the disturbing new growth of mysticism, pseudoscience, and hostility to responsible science: Shirley MacLaine's "channeling" for example, a multimillion dollar enterprise; UFOs are coming back in vogue; and Jeremy Rifkin and his ilk continue to create havoc in bioengineering while so-called antivivisectionist advocates are destroying animal research laboratories wearing leather shoes. There still exist legitimate concerns about bioengineering and about animal use in research, but these concerns are being responsibly addressed by the scientific community. For example, at the Asilomar (California) Conference in 1975, limits were self-imposed on the scope of permissible recombinant DNA research until the risks could be exhaustively evaluated.

The fundamental unstated problem, underlying the spurious enterprises that allows for pseudoscience to flourish at our collective expense, is the low estate in our society of individuals able or willing to think for themselves. At almost any time, there are pervasive, almost all-encompassing, pressures to direct what we are to think. For example, carefully listen to and watch the evening anchored news on our national networks. Every segment is so presented with voice inflections and graphics to match, to subtly (and not so subtly) assert an opinion: The NFL is on strike (that's bad). President Reagan signs the budget bill

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## From the Chair, from page 1

that's good). Gorbachev is wooing the Europeans (that's bad).

...(AIDS research offers hope (that's good). And then, for good measure, comes the commercials. There is no getting away from this intellectual dictatorship. We are almost inured to it, but for CSICOP, the SCS and other like-minded groups and individuals.

I would like to direct our readers once again to a previous *LASER* article entitled "Encourage Thinking Rather Than Debunking" (Vol. 3, no. 1) by SCS Executive Director Al Seckel that sets out the important goals of CSICOP in general and SCS in particular. This article deserves to be reread at least once a year. For a long time, we have been preaching to the choir, and concentrating on Uri Geller, astrology, UFOs, the Bermuda Triangle and other aberrations that are heresies to rational thinking. Al Seckel's point is very well taken: Our function should be to encourage and teach better thinking skills rather than just debunk muddled thoughts. We should not just provide pat answers, but

help guide the questioner to answer his or her own questions. We must somehow encourage the use of reason rather than the blind acceptance of authority.

We are to give substance, in this 200th Anniversary of the U.S. Constitution, to Jefferson's assertion about the victory of rational thought in an informed citizenry of our Republic. Accomplishing such a mission is likely to be a never-ending task, for us and for our progeny. But SCS is making a difference, and some significant results are already in place; Above all, the 7-2 decision of the U.S. Supreme Court declaring it to be unconstitutional to teach Creationism as science in the Louisiana public science classrooms. The recognition by such powerful organs as the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Santa Monica News*, of the public value of our mission includes regular feature columns in their respective papers. There are also financial grants and more public access in process for the SCS, and much more. We are finally breaking through to the public-at-large, where the action has got to be if we are to make a lasting impact.

## SCS Profit & Loss Statement for 1987

The following profit and loss statement of the Southern California Skeptics covers the months 12/1/86 through 12/31/87. This statement was prepared by SCS Treasurer Bart Hibbs. There are no paid salaries. SCS is operated strictly on a volunteer basis. This applies not only to Board Members and Technical Consultants, but to the Executive Director and Treasurer as well.

In addition, you may notice that we would not be able to run this organization based only the income generated from renewals and new subscribers. We need your donations as well, they are very important to us. Thank you for making our organization work.

### INCOME FOR 1987

NEW SUBSCRIBERS	\$11,650.00	23.39%
RENEWALS	12,960.00	26.02
DONATIONS	11,698.09	23.48
MERCHANDISE SALES	10,283.12	20.66
BANQUET	2,864.00	5.75
MISC.	201.17	0.40
LECTURE INCOME	150.00	0.30
TOTAL	\$49,806.38	100%

### EXPENSES FOR 1987

PRINTING	\$9,261.17	18.59%
BOOKS	9,075.01	18.22
POSTAGE	7,604.53	15.27
OFFICE RENT	5,600.00	11.24
TELEPHONE	4,758.53	9.55
SPEAKER FEES	2,190.39	4.40
AMICUS EXPENSES <sup>1</sup>	1,883.18	3.78
MISC.	1,394.85	2.80
COMPUTER	1,147.79	2.30
T-SHIRTS	936.28	1.88
SCS DISPLAY	824.27	1.65
BANQUET	803.00	1.61
CONFERENCE <sup>2</sup>	684.90	1.21
OFFICE SUPPLIES	429.54	0.86
VIDEOS	372.70	0.75
BANK FEES	211.05	0.43
ADVERTISING	189.91	0.31
BAD CHECKS	25.00	0.05
TOTAL	\$47,312.10	95.08%

1. These are expenses that were still left over from our preparation of and sponsorship of the Nobel Laureate *amicus curiae* brief that was presented to the U.S. Supreme Court in the Louisiana Creation/Evolution Case. The bulk expense of the brief, however, was paid in 1986.

2. SCS sponsored a conference on pseudoscience with the Pacific Division of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in San Diego.