

# Notices

of the American Mathematical Society

EDITOR: Hugo Rossi

ASSOCIATE EDITORS:

Robert F. Fossum, Susan Friedlander (*Forum Editor*),  
Steven Krantz, Susan Landau, Andy Magid,  
Mary Beth Ruskai

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR: Keith Devlin

PRODUCTION EDITOR: Sandra Frost

SENIOR WRITER: Allyn Jackson

PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS:

Muriel Toupin, Anne-Marie Epp

PRODUCTION:

Lori Nero, Donna Salter, Deborah Smith, Peter Sykes, Maxine Wolfson

ADVERTISING SALES: Anne Newcomb

**SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION:** Subscription prices for Volume 43 (1996) are \$270 list; \$216 institutional member; \$162 individual member. (The subscription price for members is included in the annual dues.) A late charge of 10% of the subscription price will be imposed upon orders received from nonmembers after January 1 of the subscription year. Add for postage: Surface delivery outside the United States and India—\$15; in India—\$34; expedited delivery to destinations in North America—\$32; elsewhere—\$67. Subscriptions and orders for AMS publications should be addressed to the American Mathematical Society, P.O. Box 5904, Boston, MA 02206-5904. All orders must be prepaid.

**ADVERTISING:** *Notices* publishes situations wanted and classified advertising, and display advertising for publishers and academic or scientific organizations.

**SUBMISSIONS:** The *Notices* Editorial Board encourages submission of articles on mathematics, the profession, and mathematics education, as well as shorter articles or reviews, and Letters to the Editor. Written material can be sent directly to the editors or to the Providence office.

**NOTICES ON e-MATH:** Most of this publication is now available electronically through e-MATH on the World Wide Web. e-MATH is the Society's resource for delivering electronic products and services to mathematicians. To access the *Notices* on e-MATH, use the URL:

<http://e-math.ams.org/>  
(or <http://www.ams.org/>)

(For those with VT100-type terminals or for those without WWW browsing software, connect to e-MATH via Telnet (telnet e-math.ams.org; login and password e-math) and use the Lynx option from the main menu.)

[*Notices of the American Mathematical Society* is published monthly by the American Mathematical Society at 201 Charles Street, Providence, RI 02904-2213. Second class postage paid at Providence, RI and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address change notices to *Notices of the American Mathematical Society*, P.O. Box 6248, Providence, RI 02940-6248.] Publication here of the Society's street address, and the other information in brackets above, is a technical requirement of the U.S. Postal Service. All correspondence should be mailed to the Post Office box, not the street address. Tel: 401-455-4000. e-mail: [ams@math.ams.org](mailto:ams@math.ams.org).

© Copyright 1995 by the  
American Mathematical Society.  
All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America.  
The paper used in this journal is acid-free and  
falls within the guidelines established  
to ensure permanence and durability.

## ABOUT THE COVER

The computer generated image entitled "Emperor's Cloak" is reproduced with permission of Michael Field and Martin Golubitsky from *Symmetry in Chaos*, published by Oxford University Press, 1992.

# Whither Democracy?

After many years of one-party rule, the tiny republic of Arcania finally held its first contested election for president in 1991. However, it continued the unusual practice of including appointed judges as voting members of its legislative body; some defeated candidates were even appointed to these judgeships. Recently, the president's appointed cabinet began to press to have themselves added to the legislature as voting members.

What country would make such a mockery of democracy? Why, none other than our own AMS. The October 1995 *Notices* (pp. 1148-1152) contains a proposal to add the appointed policy committee chairs to the AMS Council as full voting members. Although this was tabled at its August meeting (December 1995 *Notices*, pp. 1548-1552), the Council did vote to invite "...chairs of the policy committees to attend meetings of the Council with *full privileges of the floor* and request[s] that the Trustees subvent their travel in a manner similar to *ordinary Council members*." While this would appear to be a well-intentioned compromise, the addition of "nonordinary" nonvoting members to the Council seems to violate Article IV, Section 4 of the AMS bylaws, which states, "All members of the Council shall be voting members" (November 1995 *Notices*, pp. 1317-1321).

Whether or not this violates the letter of the bylaws, it certainly violates their spirit. The right to determine the makeup of its Council belongs to the membership of the AMS, which must ratify changes to the bylaws.

Communication between the Council and AMS committees is important, and there may be times when a policy chair's presence at a Council meeting is desirable. But this hardly justifies giving them "full privileges of the floor" on unrelated matters, much less the right to vote. Moreover, a much stronger case can be made for inviting chairs of other (i.e., non-policy) AMS committees to speak to the Council on relevant matters. The Council resolution which authorized the five policy committees also provided that each committee should include three elected members of the Council (May/June 1993 *Notices*, p. 526). If this communication mechanism is not working effectively, there is a serious problem with the policy committees, and it is that committee structure, not the makeup of Council, which should be changed.

The creation of policy committees has given rise to other communication problems. Council meetings (except for executive sessions) are open to *all* AMS members, and any member may obtain copies of the agenda and minutes. In recent years the Council has permitted representatives from interested committees and groups to speak on matters before it. By contrast, committee meetings are normally closed; only a committee chair can invite a nonmember to attend or even see the agenda or minutes. When there is overlap of charges, the chair of one committee need not even inform, much less invite, other chairs. Even policy committees have sometimes found that their recommendations have been significantly altered or rejected by the AMS Executive Committee and/or Board of Trustees so that the original recommendation was not placed on the Council agenda. Some matters do require careful study and review by small groups; AMS governance requires a careful balance between this need, openness, and communication.

One can also question the long-standing practice of including appointed editors on the Council as full voting members. It is hard to see why the editor of a mathematics journal should have more entitlement than any other member to vote on such matters as redirection of the Centennial fellowship, ethical employment practices, or the establishment of an Institutional Members Advisory Committee. At present, these editors are appointed by the Council upon the recommendation of the *elected* Editorial Boards Committee (EBC). Although not reported in the *Notices*, the agenda for the August Council meeting also included a proposal (which would not require an amendment to the bylaws) to replace this elected EBC group by one appointed by the president.

Why is democracy under such threat in the *American* Mathematical Society? Democracy, whether in federal government, local government, or professional societies, is hardly a perfect system. A benevolent dictatorship (especially one with *me* at the helm) can be much more efficient. In a democracy candidates are sometimes elected on the basis of name recognition, while highly capable opponents are defeated. Within democracy, there is also an important role for appointed officials, but balance of power makes it advisable to separate their functions from those of elected bodies.

Most of us find that, despite its faults, democratic government is preferable to any other system. Why, then, do we not extend that judgment to the society that provides our professional representation as well?

—Mary Beth Ruskai