



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Reaction to John W. Dawson's Review in September 2018 *Notices*

To the Editor:

I was appalled by the last sentences in the otherwise excellent (in my humble opinion) John W. Dawson's review of Karl Sigmund's *Exact Thinking...* book, published in the September 2018 issue of the *Notices*.

I thought that the AMS in general, and the *Notices* as its publication in particular, is not a political entity and does not take partisan sides. Yes, we mathematicians are very much parts of the society. It's only normal that [an] individual mathematician, just like any individual, may or may not hold strong political views, and may or may not subscribe to different party affiliations. But as a community we are as diverse as the society we live in, with all kinds of political views represented among us. Moreover, we as a community are affected by what happens around us, including many controversial issues of the day, and in turn should participate in the life of our society and strive to change it for the better.

That being said, I always expect that *Notices* is a publication that doesn't go into politics per se, and when dealing with political issues out of necessity—when such issues are relevant to the mathematical community—it takes a balanced approach. A prime example would be the September 2017 issue, part of which was devoted to the immigration ban. One may or may not agree with the policy enforced by that ban—but everybody could benefit from the coverage offered in that issue, presented in a tasteful and respectful manner.

Unfortunately, that wasn't the case with this piece in the September 2018 issue. Whether one likes Trump or not (which shouldn't even matter, because that's what democracies are about—allowing people to have different views), it's impossible to ignore the fact that the constant anti-Trump bashing in the media has reached unprecedented levels, far exceeding any anti-Bush Jr. criticisms during his presidency, and especially alarming when compared with the media's love affair with Obama. And now the *Notices* has chosen to join the ranks of all anti-right liberally biased media in tasteless bashing of everything that can be attributed as right-wing. (I leave it as just a comment, but it's pretty clear that anti-Trumpism is lurking behind that piece too.)

Stating that "*the book's title ... makes clear the relevance of the Circle's history to America today, where the scientific worldview and rational thinking in general is once again under assault by an extreme right-wing establishment*" is wrong on so many levels.

(*) First of all, it is a politically charged statement, which I find highly inappropriate for the pages of the *Notices*. In fact, over the many years that I have been reading the *Notices* I can't remember even a single other example of any statement like that.

(*) The so-called "extreme right-wing establishment" exists only in the biased minds of equally extreme ... people with the opposite view. In fact, one of [the] reasons behind all these attacks is the fact that Trump is NOT part of the establishment, and the establishment, which is much more liberal than anything else, cannot accept him.

(*) Yes, there have been controversies with some opinions and actions of the current administration, e.g. related to the discussion on global warming, etc. But "scientific worldview under attack"??? Seriously??? Do we see academic institutions being closed? Scientists prohibited from publishing their views, their research, or their findings? Faculty losing their jobs because of their thinking? I'm afraid this "attack" exists only in the author's imagination.

(*) And the cherry on top is comparing the current state of affairs in the United States with the Nazi Germany and Austria. This is as tasteless as it gets, to say the least. That attack included physical terror, racial cleansing to resolve the "Jewish question," etc. Do I really need to make the point that the current life in the US, despite all the issues and controversies, is nothing like that, not even close? To be frank, I can't understand how a person who claims adherence to "scientific worldview" and "rational thinking" could possibly draw such a parallel. Sorry, but it's spitting at the memory of all those who perished during those truly terrible times.

Sincerely,
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*We invite readers to submit letters to the editor at notices-letters@ams.org.