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Scientists slam astrology as unproved, 'pretentious'

Associated Press
NEW YORK — A statement endorsed by 186 prominent scientists challenges "the pretentious claims of astrological charlatans."

There is simply no scientific basis for astrology, which deals with presumed influences of stars, planets and other heavenly bodies on human affairs, says the statement in a special issue of the Humanist magazine.

But "acceptance of astrology pervades modern society."
"We are especially disturbed by the continued uncritical dissemination of astrological charts, forecasts, and horoscopes by the media and by otherwise reputable newspapers, magazines and book publishers."

"This can only contribute to the growth of irrationalism and obscurantism. We believe the time has come to challenge directly, and forcefully, the pretentious claims of astrological charlatans."

Eighteen Nobel Prize winners are among signers of the statement, originally drafted by Bart J. Bok, former president of the American Astronomical Society, and professor emeritus at the University of Arizona.

In a separate article, Bok writes, "It is deplorable that so many newspapers now print this daily nonsense. At the start the regular reading is sort of a fun game, but it often ends up as a mighty serious business. The steady and ready availability of astrological predictions can over many years have insidious influence on a person's personal judgment."

Regarding the reasons that people believe in astrology, the statement says, "In these uncertain times many long for the comfort of having guidance in making decisions. They would like to believe in a destiny predetermined by astral forces beyond their control. However, we must all face the world, and we must realize that our futures lie in ourselves, and not in the stars."

Among ancient people, "astrology was part and parcel of their magical world view. . . . They had no concept of the vast distances from the earth to the planets and stars."

"Now that these distances can and have been calculated, we can see how infinitesimally small are the gravitational and other effects produced by the distant stars. It is simply a mistake to imagine that the forces exerted by stars and planets at the moment of birth can in any way shape our futures."

Among Nobelists who signed the statement are Hans A. Bethe, emeritus professor of physics, Cornell University; Sir Francis Crick, biologist, Cambridge, England; Konrad Lorenz, Austrian Academy of Sciences; Sir Peter Medawar, Medical Research Council, Middlesex, England; Linus Pauling, professor of chemistry, Stanford University; Glenn T. Seaborg, physicist, University of California, Berkeley; Harold C. Urey, professor emeritus, University of California, San Diego, and George Wald, professor of biology, Harvard University.

Other scientists include Fred Hoyle, astronomer of Cambridge, England; Philip Handler, president of the National Academy of Sciences, Washington; Frederick Seitz, president, the Rockefeller University, and B. F. Skinner, professor of psychology at Harvard.

Major crime in State rises by 17 per cent

Associated Press
AUSTIN — Major crime in Texas was 17.4 per cent higher in the first six months of this year than in the comparable period of 1974, the Department of Public Safety said Tuesday.

Comparing the six-month periods, the DPS found the murder rate was up 10.7 per cent, rape 13.1 per cent, robbery 14.8 per cent, burglary 18.8 per cent, aggravated assault 3.6 per cent, theft 19.2 per cent and auto theft 8.3 per cent.

Rural areas had a much higher increase in major crimes than cities, 24.7 per cent compared with 16.7 per cent.

The percentage increases are in the rate per 100,000 people, not in the absolute number of offenses.

During the first half of this year, 310,929 major crimes were committed, or 5,160.6 per 100,000 population. The comparable figures for January-June 1974 were 259,267 offenses, for a rate of 4,396.6 per 100,000.

The percentage of crimes cleared by arrest were up considerably for each category of crime. Overall, 25 per cent of all crimes were cleared,

compared with 22 per cent a year ago.

Eighty-five per cent of all murders were solved, compared with 77 per cent in the first half of 1974. Sixty-one per cent of all rapes were cleared by arrest, compared with 51 per cent.

But solution rates on property crimes, while rising, remained low, including 20 per cent of all burglaries, compared with 17 per cent last year.

The biggest crime rate increase was posted by rural areas with more than 50 people per square mile, where the murder rate increased by 123.8 per cent and the total crime rate went up by 50.7 per cent.

Increases seen for insurance

Associated Press
AUSTIN — Auto insurance companies had their worst year in history in 1974, meaning that large rate increases are in order, an insurance industry spokesman said Tuesday.

F. Darby Hammond, president of the Southwestern Insurance Information Service, said 1975 should be an even worse year.

"Auto insurance rates no doubt will have to be increased substantially when the next State Board of Insurance calls for insurance experience and holds hearings on the matter," Hammond said.

The board has tentatively scheduled its next rate hearing for Oct. 1.

Hammond said "1974 was the worst year for the auto insurance industry, chalking up an underwriting loss totaling more than \$250 million, but first quarter results of this year predict even greater losses by year's end."

"A recent study should serve as another warning to managements and regulators alike that justified rate increases must be sought and granted if the insurance industry's sound financial condition is to be maintained."

He said claim costs in the first quarter this year averaged 22.5 per cent higher than the year before.

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