

7151 Crittenden St.,
Philadelphia, Pa. 19119
September 18, 1973.

Fellow mathematician,

On page 589 of volume 76 (1969) of the "American Mathematical Monthly" David Gale asserts that the theory of linear inequalities, unlike that of linear equations, is so incomplete that a competent mathematician would be baffled by a system of four inequalities in three unknowns, "a curious state of affairs". On reading this I immediately wrote the editor that that over fifty years ago L. L. Dines' paper in the "Annals of Mathematics", vol. 20 (1918), 191-199 put the two theories on equal footing. My letter included a solution of Gale's extremely simple single example, which it is hard to imagine baffling any one. I quote editor Harley Flanders' prompt reply, in full:

"Thank you for your letter of August 7; I find this quite interesting and hope I can publish it. You will understand that as a matter of courtesy I must let Prof. Gale have a look at it first (this **does not** mean that he will have a veto power). At the same time I shall submit your letter to an impartial referee. Gale is abroad until mid-September so it will be about two months before you hear from me again.

"I appreciate your sharp and pointed criticism and am all in favor of publishing such comments."

Roughly five months later I had no word. Accosted at a meeting, Flanders replied to my simple, courteous inquiry exactly as follows: "I sent your letter to a referee." "What did he say?" "Forget it—and you can scream as much as you like, it will get you nowhere." Apparently he had planned to follow the referee's advice. I did not scream, but went to my hotel room and wrote him a note of three lines, ignoring the conversation and asking that he publish my letter as he had proposed.

His reply quoted the author. Both of them deliberately and dishonestly avoid the mathematical issue, which can be resolved in short order by an average mathematics major who has access to a mathematical library. The two pages of the letter are confined to absurd and childish remarks. Not the least of the astounding features is the categorical statement that the "Monthly" does not publish letters, this without any confession of tergiversation or apologies for it! To heighten the insult ye Ed has since published two letters from correspondents within the pale.

As a cover-up, without my consent, the editor published on page 81 of the "Monthly", 77 (1970) the following deliberate lie:

"Professor J. M. Thomas, in a letter commenting on David Gale's **How to solve linear inequalities**, suggests that Monthly readers may be interested in the following related articles":

On the contrary, I had flatly asserted that the readers had been misled. I assumed, apparently mistakenly, that author and editor would be interested in disabusing potential readers by telling the truth.

I sent copies of the whole correspondence to Secretary Alder of the Association. His last word to me was a letter dated April 10, 1973, quoted here in full:

"This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter of April 2 and to confirm that this matter will be on the agenda of the next meeting of the Executive Committee, which will be held on August 17 and 18 at the University of Montana at Missoula."

After the committee had supposedly met, Alder passed me several times with simply a grin and a greeting. Given the lapse of time, it seems fair to assume that he, following Flanders' example, has decided to "forget it".

Gale's project was subsidized by the NSF. The officials of that organization don't seem to care and the poor taxpayers don't seem to realize what suckers they are.

In Germany the gas oven was the answer to actions such as those described above. It could happen here. If it does, many innocent will pay the price, as in Germany, while numerous chief offenders escape to be commiserated and even lionized by the unthinking soft-headed. Public indifference must share the responsibility for such cataclysms.

This communication is solely intended to discharge, at least partially, my obligation to society. It is limited to a single case because that case is so clear-cut and the mathematics so simple; I am not so naive, however, as to exclude the possibility of a smoke screen. Examples can be multiplied almost indefinitely. In fact, it might be said in defense of Gale, Flanders and Alder that they are simply sheep trotting along with the flock.

O tempora, o mores! Senatus haec intellegit, consul videt.

J. M. Thomas

P. S. While the foregoing was in the hands of the printer Alder's report of the star-chamber session (I was in the building but not invited to testify) was received one month, four days after the decision was reached:

"At its meeting in Missoula on August 18, 1973, the MAA's Executive Committee discussed at length the request contained in your letter of March 4. All members were present except Professor Flanders, who absented himself during the voting and also during most of the discussion. There was general recognition of the strength of your feelings in this matter and respect for your rights to act in support of your beliefs.

After due consideration, it was voted unanimously (6 to 0)

a) that it was the sense of the meeting of the Executive Committee that Professor Flanders had proceeded properly in the disposition of the comments you had sent him on David Gale's paper in the MONTHLY 76(1969), 589-599,

b) not to place the matter on the agenda of a meeting of the Board of Governors,

c) not to pursue the matter further,

d) to request the Secretary and the other officers of the MAA not to engage in further correspondence on this matter.

e) to request the Secretary of the MAA to send you this letter."

Note "feelings" and "beliefs" (which I consider irrelevant). My right to have them is magnanimously recognized provided I don't bother the powers-that-be further. I can readily appreciate their weariness after four years of studiously avoiding the slightest mention of the point at issue, namely, a **mathematical mistake** which still stands uncorrected on page 589 of the "Monthly" 76(1969). This may be a record to make filibustering Congressmen green with envy.

The last chapter, page 569, of Robert Payne's "The Life and Death of Adolph Hitler" is highly perceptive and relevant to the matter here discussed.