6. ASTRONOMICAL TELEGRAMS (TÉLÉGRAMMES ASTRONOMIQUES)
(Committee of the Executive Committee)

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I. INTRODUCTION

The bulk of the Commission's work has, as in previous years, been carried out most efficiently by the I.A.U. Bureau, especially by its Director, Dr. B.G. Marsden.

As predicted in the report by our previous President, rapid transmission of information by electronic means is now with us; details can be found in the Report of the Central Bureau below. With the ever-increasing cost of telegrams (and their occasional loss or misdirection) more astronomers will be attracted to the new methods.

The Commission is particularly grateful to the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory for its continued support.

M.P. Candy
PRESIDENT OF THE COMMISSION

II. REPORT OF THE CENTRAL BUREAU FOR ASTRONOMICAL TELEGRAMS

During the triennium the Central Bureau for Astronomical Telegrams issued "telegram books" and Circulars on the following occasions:

	Telegrams	Circulars
1981 (from 24 Oct.)	4	9 (Nos. 3642-3655)
1982	54	64 (Nos. 3656-3758)
1983	60	70 (Nos. 3759-3904)
1984 (to 31 Oct.)	42	53 (Nos. 3905-4002)

The exceptional activity during 1983 was due to the record 23 announcements of discoveries and recoveries of comets. The announcement of comet IRAS-Araki-Alcock (1983d) one week before it made the closest approach of any comet to the earth since 1770 caused the Bureau to have its busiest time ever. The Bureau made quick checks on some 50 tentative reports from IRAS of unusual moving objects, one of which was the 'Geminid parent' 1983 TB. Other highlights during the triennium were the recovery of P/Halley and the visual discovery by the Australian amateur R.O. Evans of several supernovae.

Increases in subscription rates, in June 1982 to 55c and 33c, and a year later to 60c and 36c, for 'regular' and 'special' accounts, respectively, as well as a deterioration in the speed with which the Circulars are printed and delivered, caused the number of subscribers to drop to around 730 during the latter part of 1983. There was subsequently a significant improvement in printing and delivery, however, and the number of subscribers increased to around 780 by October 1984.

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Beginning in October 1982, the copy for the Circulars was prepared by computer. Beginning in January 1984, the Circulars have been available directly in computer form to subscribers to the Bureau's computer service. For an additional charge of 30c per day the computer service allows subscribers to 'dial in' to read complete Circulars as soon as they are issued, to leave and receive messages, and to obtain orbital elements and ephemerides. Since telephone charges are necessarily involved also, the vast majority of the 30 computer-service subscribers are in North America, but there is also a subscriber in each of West Germany and Japan. Computer dissemination of information is clearly and rapidly becoming the way of the future, and with its introduction the Bureau discontinued the use of the generally unsatisfactory and already rather old-fashioned system of automatic recording of telephoned messages.

The Bureau's telegram service continues to operate, however, and although the cost is greater and much less information is provided than in the computer service, it has the advantage of being 'passive', whereas a computer-service subscriber may either just miss a particularly urgent message or find no change since his last call; furthermore, while telegrams may be issued at weekends, Circulars are not. Subscription rates for telexed and mailgram messages in North America were increased to $4.00 and $3.00, respectively, in January 1984, while overseas telexes and cablegrams and telephoned domestic telegrams continue to cost a minimum of $7.00. From early 1983, World Data Center A for Solar-Terrestrial Physics, Boulder, Colorado, was no longer able to relay telegrams for the Bureau, so messages are now telexed directly to its counterpart in Moscow for distribution in the USSR. Telexes are also sent to the counterpart in Sydney, and following the retirement of F.E. Cook, the further distribution of messages in Australia and New Zealand has been handled by P. Davies; this generosity of the Ionospheric Prediction Service has resulted in the anomaly that these subscribers are paying only $2.00 per message.

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Director of the Bureau

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