

INNOCENT (?) BYSTANDER
By Everett W. Gross

The CRETE NEWS lead editorial for Feb. 22 is loaded with conventional wisdom, and so is the letter from Charlie. And here is some more: Beware of the man of one idea (or one book, or one issue, etc.) Pardon me for ducking whenever I hear that because I consider myself just such a man.

One of my great comforting thoughts in this matter is that a man named Copernicus 4 or 5 centuries ago could have been thought of in just such a way. In his time, astronomy was a rather mature field of study. The Earth was stationary and the Sun moved around it every day at a rate known rather accurately. The Moon's position was also predictable for a long time into the future. The motions of the planets had been under study for thousands of years, and although somewhat mysterious, were just about being reduced to their final descriptions in terms of circles whose centers traveled along other circles whose centers traveled along still other circles whose - - - - - . These sets of circles were getting so complicated that the best way for a student to earn a higher degree in astronomy was to calculate the radius and center of another circle at one higher degree of complexity. This would give one more decimal place in the position of one more planet.

But still there were puzzles. It was taking dozens of circles to describe the motion of each planet. Then came this nutty fellow, Copernicus with his one idea for stripping away most of the difficulties. He was not the first, but he presented a good Latin version of: "Hoot mon, a lot of things will make more sense if you look at the system with the Sun instead of the Earth stationary in the middle."

Still for more than a hundred years, people were being tortured and burned for believing Copernicus.

There have been other cases where a single idea has waded in and scattered a whole bunch of mysteries. My own single idea is in the area of economics, and I might be guilty of wording it a dozen ways. Every day's newspaper brings several articles about distressing mysteries which should not be mysteries at all. Just listing them would take a good chunk of this newspaper page. They are mostly