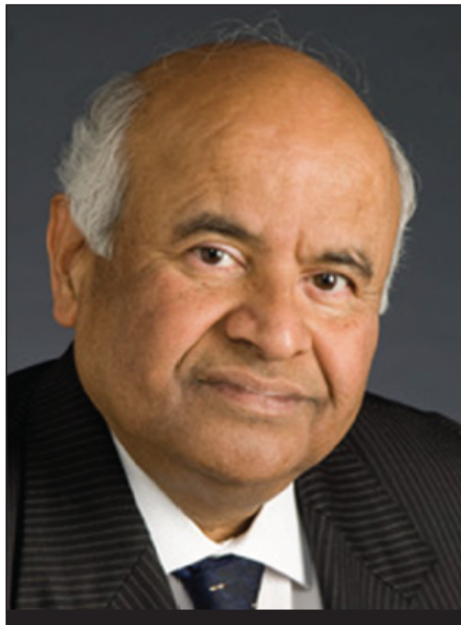


# The President's Page

## THE PRESIDENT'S PAGE

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### PLUS ÇA CHANGE, PLUS C'EST LA MÊME CHOSE



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The title of this President's Page is an epigram by Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr (1808–1890) who served as an Editor of *Le Figaro*, a newspaper published in Paris. It is usually translated as “the more things change, the more they stay the same.” To illustrate this I thought it might be instructive to take a look at the first (July 1978) “Message from the President” written by Bob Lucky. He was our 1978–79 President and needs no introduction ([www.boblucky.com](http://www.boblucky.com)).

Read and enjoy, we haven't changed that much...

"I've been President of the Communications Society now for several months. So far I've had very little chance to issue the necessary proclamations which will give our members all that I pledged in my campaign— mainly extra vacation days, increased pay, and guaranteed prestigious awards. I was thinking of starting by forming a committee, but I'm afraid that if I give an order, nobody will pay any attention.

I'd like to introduce myself through this column. It would be nice if our magazine could afford a reporter who could interview me, and then fix up the answers so they sound intelligent, but it can't. So I thought I'd interview myself, asking probing questions about matters of concern to ComSoc members. Here goes:

**Q.**How did you get to be President of ComSoc?

**A.** I'm not sure.

**Q.**What does the President do?

**A.**I'm not sure of that either. I get a lot of mail from IEEE. By the time I figure it all out, someone else will be President, and I don't think he'll be too sure either.

**Q.**Who are these guys that run ComSoc?

**A.** Like any volunteer organization, there are lots of members, but only a small number of people who, for whatever reason, decide to get personally involved. In ComSoc we have about 11,000 members and maybe one or two hundred people who are involved in the organization itself. Our Society is heavily organized in comparison with other IEEE Societies that I know of, i.e., we have lots of committees and boards. I know Parkinson's laws apply here, but I've come to the conclusion that it's not so bad in a volunteer organization. Things do get done, and people do have fun doing them.

**Q.**What things get done?

**A.** Mostly we run meetings and publish things, but I'm always amazed at how many other matters require lengthy deliberations.

**Q.**Why should I get involved in ComSoc?

**A.**One reason is the possibility of helping our profession. For me, it's more the people that you work with. Through [IEEE](#) and ComSoc I've made lots of friends throughout our country and in other parts of the world. (Some of them probably even voted for me, but I'm not too sure.) It gives me a feeling of being a part of a real international professional community. Also, it's a great help in keeping current with technical work going on outside your own establishment.

**Q.** I think I'd like to get involved in ComSoc: How do I do it?

**A.**Maybe the best way would be to join a [Technical Committee](#). These are listed on the inside back cover of the Transactions each month. If you write to the Committee Chairman, are willing to do a little work, and have some relevant background, I think it's likely you'd be enthusiastically welcomed.

**Q.**What do the [Technical Committees](#) do?

**A.** Mostly they run meetings and publish things. More specifically, each committee is responsible for organizing sessions in their field at the various conferences and for reviewing papers for conferences and the Transactions. Some committees sponsor workshops and contribute to the organization of various specialized conferences. They do other things too; I'm

not always sure what they are.

**Q.** I've never attended any of your conferences. I don't read any of the papers in your Transactions. Why do I belong to the Communications Society?

**A.** I don't know, but you're in the majority. Surprisingly, perhaps, only a small percentage of our members attend the meetings. We get more than a thousand at ICC and NTC each year, but I suspect it's the same thousand each time. As to not reading the Transactions, I suspect you're in the overwhelming majority. Our polls have shown that the average poll returner reads about one paper an issue. I really don't believe it myself. I think people are ashamed to admit they don't read papers. They fill out an anonymous questionnaire in the dark in a closet, and lie-to themselves more than anyone. Incidentally, the Transactions is a real bargain. The printing costs alone are more than your ComSoc membership fee. (The journals are heavily subsidized by nonmember subscriptions.) The other thing is that, as inefficient as it may seem, the journal system has worked. Somehow the information the journals contain does get into circulation and, of course, there is the archival value.

**Q.** Where do you get all those lousy papers that are published in the Transactions?

**A.** Believe it or not, people send them to us. If you think these are bad, you should see some of the ones we reject.

**Q.** What are my chances of getting a paper published in the Transactions?

**A.** Based on statistics, about 50%. Your paper goes to three reviewers, and if they like it, you're in. However, it's an imperfect system and reviewers have been known to make mistakes. Most authors feel that their paper is so good that it should be accepted by an immediate telegram with publication the following week in a special issue devoted solely to their paper with their picture on the cover of the journal. In practice, we have to settle for something less. Reviewers are only human, and they often like to show their own brilliance by making critical remarks about even the best of papers. There's also the slim possibility to consider that maybe your paper isn't quite as good as you think.

**Q.** Why don't you publish more practical or applications papers?

**A.** Believe it or not, people don't send them to us. Everyone in IEEE wants to publish more applications oriented papers. However, it often seems that people who actually design things aren't inclined to paper publishing. Also, many companies aren't too keen on giving away real design secrets. How about some equations, instead? Please, if you're in a position to write an applications paper about some communications system or component, give us a chance to publish it.

**Q.** I have a good idea to make ComSoc more effective in helping its membership. What should I do with it?

**A.** How about writing or calling me?

**Q.** I have a complaint to register about ComSoc. What should I do with it?

**A.** Thanks for reading this interview."