



(11) **EP 1 243 548 B2**

(12) **NEW EUROPEAN PATENT SPECIFICATION**
After opposition procedure

(45) Date of publication and mention of the opposition decision:
31.07.2013 Bulletin 2013/31

(51) Int Cl.:
B67D 1/04 (2006.01)

(45) Mention of the grant of the patent:
03.12.2008 Bulletin 2008/49

(21) Application number: **01205036.5**

(22) Date of filing: **21.08.1998**

(54) **Beverage dispensing apparatus**

Getränkespender

Distributeur de boisson

(84) Designated Contracting States:
DE ES FR GB IT

(30) Priority: **04.09.1997 NL 1006948**

(43) Date of publication of application:
25.09.2002 Bulletin 2002/39

(62) Document number(s) of the earlier application(s) in accordance with Art. 76 EPC:
98937716.3 / 0 935 585

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Description

[0001] The invention relates to a beverage dispensing apparatus according to the preamble of claim 1.

[0002] Such an apparatus is known from WO-A-95/20540 and is intended for dispensing aerated or non-aerated beverages, particularly beer. In this known apparatus a flexible bag containing a beverage is accommodated in a chamber of a vessel, after which the chamber is hermetically sealed by means of a cover. The space between the chamber and the bag is pressurized. A flexible hose connects an outlet of the bag to a beverage delivery tap. To this end, the hose is passed through an opening in the cover. A drawback of this construction is that the hose in this opening should be sealed very effectively because the hose is situated, at least partly, in the pressure space.

[0003] It is an object of the invention to improve a beverage dispensing apparatus of the type defined in the opening paragraph, in such a manner that the aforementioned drawback is avoided and, in addition, the apparatus becomes user-friendly.

[0004] To this end, a beverage dispensing apparatus according to claim 1 is provided.

Now the pressure space is no longer bounded by the cover. The line or hose coupled to the outlet is now situated wholly outside the pressure space. The sealing problem as mentioned hereinbefore for the apparatus in accordance with WO-A-95/20540 does not occur any longer. An additional advantage is that it is now possible in a simple manner to automatically create a pressure space when the beverage container is introduced into the chamber of the housing. Operation becomes easier for the user.

[0005] For reasons of hygiene the outlet of a new container filled with a beverage is closed by means of a pierceable sealing membrane. For perforating the membrane the container comprises a piercing mechanism which is connected to a beverage delivery hose and which automatically pierces the sealing diaphragm as soon as the pressure space is pressurized for the first time. For this purpose, when a beverage container is disposed in the chamber and locked, there is some distance between the flange of the container and the locking slides, which enables the container to be moved upward over said distance when the pressure space is pressurized and thus to pierce the membrane. A construction by means of which a sealing membrane can be pierced is known per se from WO-A-95/20540. However, in said construction piercing must be effected by hand.

[0006] The apparatus further has a number of safety features to preclude the undesired turn-on of the pressure and the undesirable discharge of beverage.

[0007] Owing to the constructional measures that have been taken the operation of the apparatus is very user friendly as well as safe.

[0008] The invention will now be described in more detail, by way of example, with reference to an embodiment

shown in the drawings. In the drawings:

Fig. 1 is a diagrammatic perspective view of a beverage dispensing apparatus in accordance with the invention,

Fig. 2 is a diagrammatic cross-sectional view of the apparatus shown in Fig. 1,

Fig. 3 shows the locking mechanism and the sealing means of the beverage container in the apparatus in a cross-sectional view taken on the line III-III in Fig. 4,

Fig. 4 shows the locking and unlocking mechanism for the beverage container,

Fig. 5 is a cross-sectional view of the locking mechanism and the sealing means of the beverage container of the apparatus in another embodiment than that shown in Fig. 3,

Fig. 6 is a cross-sectional view of the apparatus to illustrate the piercing of the sealing membrane of the beverage container,

Fig. 7 is a side view of the tapping device,

Fig. 8 is a plan view of the tapping device,

Fig. 9 is a front view of the tapping device, and

Fig. 10 is a front view of an opened tapping device of Fig. 9.

[0009] The beverage dispensing apparatus shown in Fig. 1 comprises a housing 1 having an opening 2 which gives access to a chamber 3. A cover 4 is hingeably connected to the housing 1 to open and close the chamber. Through the opening 2 a beverage container, for example a beer container, can be placed into the chamber 3. The housing further carries a tapping device 6. A beverage delivery line 7 has one end connected to an outlet 8 of the beverage container and the other end to the tapping device 6.

[0010] Fig. 2 is a diagrammatic representation of the beverage dispensing apparatus in which a beverage container 5 has been placed. An annular part 9, mounted on the upper rim of the housing 1 around the opening 2, carries locking and sealing means for the beverage container 5. The locking means for locking the beverage container in the chamber 3 comprises a plurality of spring-loaded locking slides 10 which are movable in radial directions. The beverage container has a collar 11, which is fixedly connected to a wall of the container and which has a flange 12 for cooperation with the locking slides 10. A sealing ring 13 is attached to the annular part 9 for the purpose of sealing the container in the chamber. When a beverage container is placed into the chamber the locking slides 10 are urged outward against the force of the springs 14 by the flange of the container. After the flange has moved past the slides the slides move radially inward again under the spring load, thereby locking the container in the chamber. The sealing ring 13 then lies against the inner wall 15 of the chamber as well as against the flange 12 of the container (see also Fig. 3). By means of this sealing an air-tight space 17 is formed between

the inner wall 15 of the chamber and the outer wall 16 of the container. This space 17 is connected to a pump 19 by means of a line 18. The pressure in the space 17 can be raised by means of the pump. The pressure medium is preferably air. Raising the pressure in this pressure space causes an external pressure to be exerted on the deformable wall 16 of the beverage container and, consequently, on the beverage. When a tap of the tapping device 6 is now opened, the beverage is forced out through the beverage delivery hose and can be collected in a glass or cup.

[0011] The sealing and locking (as well as unlocking) will now be described in more detail with reference to the detailed drawings in Figs. 3 and 4. The annular part 9 with the locking mechanism and the seal is mounted on the upper rim 20 of the housing 1. This annular part 9 comprises a lower ring 9a and, spaced therefrom, an upper ring 9b, between which the locking slides 10 are disposed. For this purpose, the lower ring 9a carries pins 21, which engage in openings 22 of the locking slides (Fig. 4). The locking slides are pulled inward by the force of a helical spring 14. The inner ends of the locking slides are noseshaped in such a manner that both an upper surface 23 and a lower surface 24 thereof slope downward in radially inward directions. During placement of the container into the chamber the oblique upper surface 23 assists in urging away the slides 10 by means of the flange 12 of the collar 11 of the container 5. The bevel 37 of the flange also contributes to this.

[0012] The sealing ring 13 is clamped between a part of the upper rim 20 of the housing and the lower ring 9a. The sealing ring has an inwardly directed flexible lip 25, which also has a downward slope. The flexible sealing lip is in sealing engagement with the flange 12 of the container disposed in the chamber. The pressure space 17 can be pressurized by means of the pump 19. Preferably, air is used for this purpose. The air pressure ensures that the sealing lip 25 is pressed even more firmly against the flange and the pressure space 17 is sealed even more effectively. The pressure in the pressure space exerts a force on the container, which consequently tends to move upward. The locking slides 10 prevent the container 5 from moving upward.

[0013] If an empty container is to be removed from the chamber, the pressure in the pressure space should first be relieved. Once this has happened the locking slides 10 can be pushed back against the force of the spring 14, i.e. pushed or pulled outward. For this purpose, there has been provided an unlocking mechanism formed by an unlocking ring 26 having oblique cam surfaces 27. The ring 26 is rotatable about the axis 28. The locking slides 10 have each been provided with an unlocking pin 29, which unlocking pins co-operate with the oblique surfaces 27 of the unlocking ring 26. To rotate the unlocking ring this ring has a small handle 30, which projects through an opening 31 in the upper ring 9b (the upper ring 9b is not shown in Fig. 4). The upper ring also has another small handle 32. By urging the two handles 30

and 32 towards one another the unlocking ring 26 is rotated counterclockwise. As a result of this, the oblique cam surfaces 27 urge the unlocking pins 29 and, as a consequence, the locking slides 10 outward, so that the flange 12 is no longer locked and an empty container 5 can be removed. Removing a container from the chamber is not possible when the pressure space 17 is still under pressure. As long as the space 17 is under pressure the flange 12 is urged against the inclined lower surfaces 24 of the slides 10. Pushing back the slides 10 is made virtually impossible by the inclined lower surfaces 24.

[0014] Instead of a collar 11 which is fixedly connected to the wall of the container it is possible to use a "separate removable collar", as is shown in Fig. 5. After a container 5 has been placed into chamber 3 of the apparatus a collar 11' is placed onto the neck 88 with the outlet opening 8 of the container. An outer flange 12' has been provided with a sealing ring 13' for sealing with respect to the inner wall 15 of the chamber 3, while an inner flange 12" has been provided with a sealing ring 13" for sealing with respect to the neck 88 of the container. In the same way as in the example of Fig. 3, the flange 12' co-operates with the locking slides 10 for locking the container in the chamber of the apparatus.

[0015] For reasons of hygiene the beverage container is sealed hermetically until it is put into use. For this purpose, a sealing membrane 33 is arranged over the outlet opening 8 and is attached to the edge of the opening (see Fig. 6). The beverage delivery line 7 is formed by a hose 34 having a right-angled inlet pipe 35 at its inlet end. This inlet pipe extends into a union 36 of the collar to a location just above the membrane 33. When the container 5 is placed into the chamber 3 the lower surface 37 of the flange 12 bears on an edge portion 38 of the inner wall 15 of the chamber. The upper surface of the flange 12 is situated at a distance A beneath the locking slide 10. When the cover 4 is closed the upper end 39 of the right-angled inlet pipe is disposed just underneath the closed cover 4. After the pump 19 has been started air is pumped into the pressure space 17 and the pressure rises gradually. As a result, the container 5 moves slowly upward until the flange 12 abuts against the locking slide 10. During this upward movement the end 40 of the inlet pipe 35 pierces the membrane 33, as a result of which the beverage is forced out of the container into the hose 34 towards the tapping device 6.

[0016] The tapping device 6 is shown in detail in Figs. 7-10. The tapping device comprises a lower part 41, which is fixedly connected to the housing 1, and an upper part 42, which is hingeably connected to the lower part by means of a hinge 43 (Figs. 8 and 10). Both parts have a groove 44 and 45, respectively (Fig. 10), in which the beverage delivery hose 34 can be arranged. The outlet end of the hose has a right-angled outlet pipe 46. The lower part of the tapping device has a vertical channel 47 through which the outlet pipe can be passed. For reasons of hygiene the end portion 46a of the outlet pipe

projects fully from the channel 47, so that the beverage cannot come into contact with the lower part 41 of the tapping device. For a convenient operation the outlet pipe 46 has a handle 48 which may bear an indication of the kind of beverage. The tapping device further comprises a shut-off mechanism by means of which the flexible hose can be pinched off or opened. This shut-off mechanism comprises a clamping block 48, which is vertically movable against the force of a spring 50. The clamping block has two upright pressure pins 51 between which a hose clamp 52 formed by a V-shaped pressure member is interposed. The hose 34 extends over this V-shaped pressure member. The shut-off mechanism further comprises a lever 53, which is situated in the upper part 42 of the tapping device and which is pivotable about a pivot 54. At one side of the pivot this lever has a forked arm 55 whose ends 56 co-operate with the pressure pins 51 of the clamping block 49. At the other side of the pivot 54 the lever 53 has an arm 60. The upper part 42 of the tapping device comprises an actuation handle or tap 57, which is pivotable about a tap spindle 58. The tap spindle 58 carries an eccentric cam 59, which co-operates with the arm 60 of the lever. Fig. 7 shows in solid lines the situation in which the ends 56 of the forked arms 55 are just clear of the pressure pins 51, so that the spring 50 urges the clamping block 49 upward as far as possible and the hose 34 is pinched off completely by the hose clamp 52. When the tap 57 is turned clockwise the eccentric cam 59 is pressed against the arm 60 and the lever 53 is pivoted counter-clockwise. The ends 56 of the arm 55 press the pressure pins 51 and, consequently, the hose downward. As a result of this, the hose 34 is opened and the beverage can flow through the hose to the outlet pipe 46. When the tap is swung back the hose is pinched off immediately and the outflow ceases. The upper part 42 of the tapping device can be locked to the lower part 41 by means of a locking mechanism 61.

[0017] The housing 1 of the apparatus is double-walled, a thermally insulating material 63 being interposed between the outer wall 62 and the inner wall 15, which forms the wall of the chamber 3 (Fig. 2). The housing 1 further accommodates the following parts:

- a cooling device 64, for example a Peltier element for cooling the container 5. The cooling device has a cooling surface 65, which is in direct thermally conductive contact with the inner wall 15 of the chamber,
 - the afore-mentioned pump 19,
- a cooling fan 66 for cooling the heatsink of the cooling device and other electrical parts, such as a printed circuit board 67,
- a pressure controller for controlling the pressure in the pressure space 17,
- a temperature controller 69 for controlling the temperature of the cooling device,
- a pump switch 70 for turning on and turning off the pump 19, and
- a pressure-relief valve 71 for relieving the pressure

in the pressure space 17.

The apparatus further has a drip-tray for collecting spilled beverage.

[0018] The operation of both the pump switch 70 and the pressure-relief valve 71 is linked to the opening and closing of the cover 4 on the housing 1. A line 73 connects the pressure controller 68 to the line 18 between the pump 19 and the pressure space 17. A line 74 extends from the pressure controller 68 to the pressure-relief valve 71. As soon as the cover 4 is opened the pressure-relief valve is opened and the pressure space 17 is put into communication with the exterior (atmosphere) via the lines 18, 73 and 74. The pressure in the pressure space is relieved. The pump switch 70 turns off the pump 19 as soon as the cover 4 is opened and turns on the pump when the cover is closed.

[0019] As already stated, the upper part 42 of the tapping device 6 is hingeably connected to the lower part 41 and can be locked to this lower part by means of the locking mechanism 61. When the beverage dispensing apparatus is in use, i.e. when beverage can be dispensed, it is not allowed to swing the upper part 42 away from the lower part 41 because otherwise the beverage delivery hose 34 is no longer pinched off and beverage could flow out. Swinging up the upper part is precluded in that an edge 75 of the cover 4 lies over the upper part in the closed condition. The edge 75 has a recess 76, which engages over the upper part (see Fig. 1). The upper part 42 cannot be swung up until the cover has been opened, after unlocking. Conversely, the cover 4 cannot be closed when the upper part 42 has not been swung down onto the lower part 41. This is precluded in that a side wall 77 of the upper part in the swung-up position abuts against the edge 75 of the cover.

[0020] Another safety measure is that when no beverage container 5 having a beverage delivery line 7 has been placed into the apparatus the pump switch 70 is not actuated. To this end, a detection mechanism 78 for detecting the presence of a container is arranged on the inner side of the cover 4. This mechanism comprises an L-shaped detection rod 79. A spindle 80 is mounted transversely to this rod 79. This spindle is rotatably mounted in the cover 4. The detection rod 79 can perform a small pivotal movement about the spindle 80. For this purpose, a bracket 81 extends over the detection rod 79 with ample clearance and is secured to the inner side of the cover 4. The clearance between the bracket and the detection rod limits the pivotal movement of the rod. The end of the spindle 80 carries an actuating pin 82. This actuating pin actuates the pump switch 70. When a container 5 having a beverage delivery line 7 is present in the apparatus and the cover is closed, the short arm of the detection rod 79 abuts against the beverage delivery line 7, as a result of which rotation of the spindle is inhibited and the actuating pin 82 acts upon the pump switch 70 and the pump is turned on. However, when no container with a beverage delivery line or a container without a beverage

delivery line has been placed into the apparatus, the spindle 80 with the detection rod 79 can swing down, as a result of which the actuating pin 81 does not act upon the pump switch 69 and this switch is not actuated.

[0021] The beverage dispensing apparatus is operated as follows. It is assumed that no container is present in the apparatus. The cover 4 is opened and a container filled with beverage is placed into the chamber 3. The locking slides 10 are then urged aside. When the container has been lowered completely into the chamber the slides 10 move inward again and lock the container. The upper part 42 of the tapping device 6 is swung up and the hose 34 is placed onto the lower part 41 over the hose clamp 52, and the outlet pipe 46 is inserted into the channel 47 of the tapping device. The upper part 42 is swung down onto the lower part and is locked thereto by means of the locking mechanism 61. The hose 34 is now pinched off. The cover can be closed and the pump switch 69 is automatically switched on. Moreover, the cooling device 64 and the cooling fan 66 are turned on. The pressure space 17 is gradually pressurized, as a result of which the container 5 moves upward. The sealing membrane is pierced and the beverage is forced into the beverage delivery line (hose). The beverage can be tapped after the tap 57 has been opened. When all the beverage has been drawn from the container and is empty the cover is opened. The pump switch immediately turns off the pump and the pressure-relief valve 71 is opened, as a result of which the pressure in the pressure space 17 drops out. By means of the handles 30, 31 the locking slides 10 can be released and the empty container can be removed from the apparatus.

[0022] The embodiment described herein uses air as a pressure medium for pressurizing the container. It is alternatively possible to use, for example, a liquid pressure medium. Furthermore, the described flange 12 of the container is mounted on a collar 11, which is fixedly connected to the container. Obviously, such a flange may directly form part of the wall of the container, i.e. may be integral therewith. In the present example sealing by means of the sealing ring 13 is effected on the flange 12. However, sealing is also possible directly on the wall of the container itself. Instead of a beverage container in the form of a bottle having compressible walls it is also possible to use other types of beverage containers in the apparatus in accordance with the invention, provided that they have at least one flexible deformable wall. For this, a kind of membrane-like wall might be considered.

Claims

1. Beverage dispensing assembly comprising a beverage dispensing apparatus and a container (5) containing a beverage and having a deformable wall portion (16) the dispensing apparatus comprising a chamber (3) enclosing a pressure space between an inner wall (15) of the chamber (3) and the deform-

able wall portion (16) of the container (5), an opening (2) at the top for receiving the container (5), a hinging cover (4) for closing off the opening (2), pressure means for pressurising the pressure space to force beverage out of the container (5) via an outlet (8) closed by means of a pierceable sealing membrane (33) a tapping device (6) and a beverage delivery line (7,34) connectable with a first end (39) to the outlet (8) on the container (5) and with a second end (46) releasably connectable with the tapping device (6) for closing and opening of the delivery line (7,34), **characterized in that**, the dispensing apparatus comprises locking and sealing means for closing the chamber in an airtight manner and arranged between the beverage container and the chamber so as to form the pressure space, the container (5) bears with a lower surface (37) of a flange (12) on an edge portion (38) of the inner wall (15) of the chamber (3) and the outlet (8) is situated outside the pressure space such that after hinging the cover (4) to its closed position, the container (5) is moved upward by pressurising the pressure space and the outlet (8) is pierced by the first end (39).

2. Beverage dispensing assembly according to claim 1, wherein after hinging the cover (4) to its closed position, an L-shaped detection rod (79) attached to the cover (4) abuts with a short arm against a beverage delivery line (7,34) of a container (5) placed in the dispensing apparatus.

Patentansprüche

1. Getränkespendieranordnung, umfassend eine Getränkespendervorrichtung und einen Behälter (5), der ein Getränk enthält und einen verformbaren Wandteil (16) aufweist, wobei die Spendervorrichtung umfasst: eine Kammer (3), die einen Druckraum zwischen einer inneren Wand (15) der Kammer (3) und dem verformbaren Wandteil (16) des Behälters (5) einschließt, eine Öffnung (2) am oberen Ende zur Aufnahme des Behälters (5), einen schwenkbaren Deckel (4) zum Absperrern der Öffnung (2), Druckeinrichtungen zur Druckbeaufschlagung des Druckraums, um Getränk über einen Auslass (8), der mittels einer durchstechbaren abdichtenden Membran (33) verschlossen ist, aus dem Behälter (5) herauszudrücken, ein Zapfgerät (6) und eine Getränkeabgabelitung (7, 34), die sich an einem ersten Ende (39) mit dem Auslass (8) auf dem Behälter (5) verbinden lässt und sich an einem zweiten Ende (46) mit dem Zapfgerät (6) zum Schließen und Öffnen der Abgabelitung (7, 34) lösbar verbinden lässt, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** die Spendervorrichtung Mittel zum Sichern und Abdichten umfasst, um die Kammer luftdicht zu verschließen, wobei diese zwischen dem Getränkebehälter und der Kam-

mer angeordnet sind, so dass der Druckraum gebildet wird, der Behälter (5) mit einer Unterseite (37) eines Flansches (12) auf einem Randteil (38) der inneren Wand (15) der Kammer (3) aufsitzt und der Auslass (8) außerhalb des Druckraums angeordnet ist, so dass nach Schwenken des Deckels (4) zu seiner geschlossenen Position der Behälter (5) aufwärts bewegt wird, indem der Druckraum mit Druck beaufschlagt wird, und der Auslass (8) durch das erste Ende (39) durchgestochen wird.

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2. Getränkespenderanordnung nach Anspruch 1, bei der nach Schwenken des Deckels (4) zu seiner geschlossenen Position ein L-förmiger Detektionsstab (79), der am Deckel (4) angebracht ist, mit einem kurzen Arm an eine Getränkeabgabeleitung (7, 34) eines Behälters (5), der in die Spendervorrichtung gesetzt wird, anstößt.

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Revendications

1. Ensemble de distribution de boisson comprenant un appareil de distribution de boisson et un récipient (5) contenant une boisson et comportant une partie de paroi déformable (16), l'appareil de distribution comprenant une chambre (3) renfermant un espace sous pression entre une paroi interne (15) de la chambre (3) et la partie de paroi déformable (16) du récipient (5), une ouverture (2) au dessus destinée à recevoir le récipient (5), un couvercle articulé (4) destiné à fermer l'ouverture (2), un moyen de pression destiné à pressuriser l'espace sous pression pour faire sortir de force la boisson du récipient (5) via une sortie (8) fermée au moyen d'une membrane d'étanchéité pouvant être percée (33), un dispositif de soutirage (6) et une conduite de distribution de boisson (7,34) pouvant être reliée par une première extrémité (39) à la sortie (8) sur le récipient (5) et par une deuxième extrémité (46) pouvant être reliée de manière amovible avec le dispositif de soutirage (6) pour fermer et ouvrir la conduite de distribution (7,34), **caractérisé en ce que**, l'appareil de distribution comprend un moyen de verrouillage et d'étanchéité destiné à fermer la chambre de manière étanche à l'air et agencé entre le récipient de boisson et la chambre de manière à former l'espace sous pression, le récipient (5) est en appui avec une surface inférieure (37) d'une bride (12) sur une partie de bord (38) de la paroi interne (15) de la chambre (3) et la sortie (8) est située à l'extérieur de l'espace sous pression de sorte que, après basculement du couvercle (4) à sa position fermée, le récipient (5) est déplacé vers le haut en pressurant l'espace sous pression et la sortie (8) est percée par la première extrémité (39).
2. Ensemble de distribution de boisson selon la revendication 1, dans lequel après basculement du cou-

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vercle (4) à sa position fermée, une tige de détection en forme de L (79) fixée au couvercle (4) vient en butée avec un bras court contre une conduite de distribution de boisson (7, 34) d'un récipient (5) placé dans l'appareil de distribution.

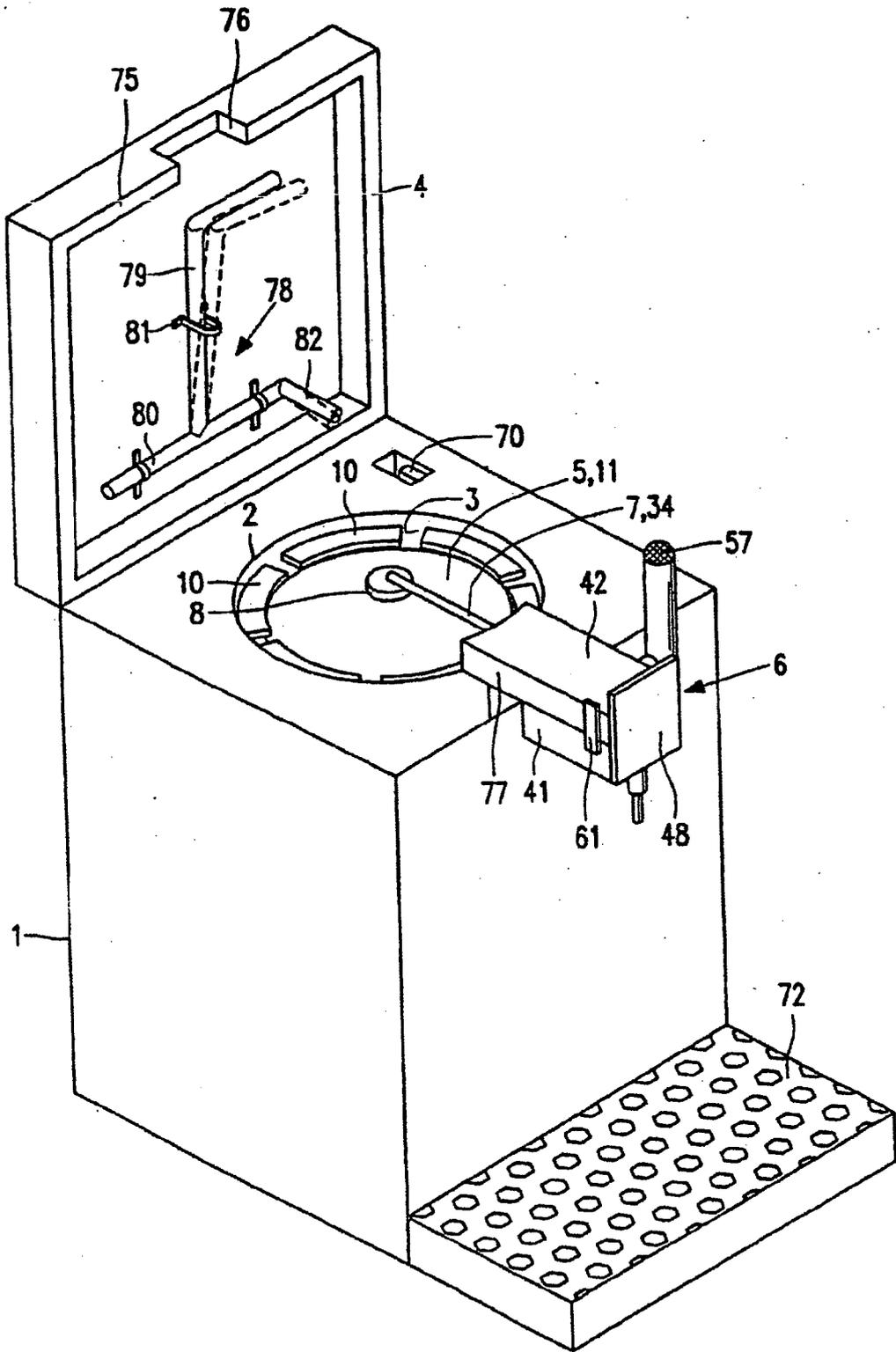


FIG. 1

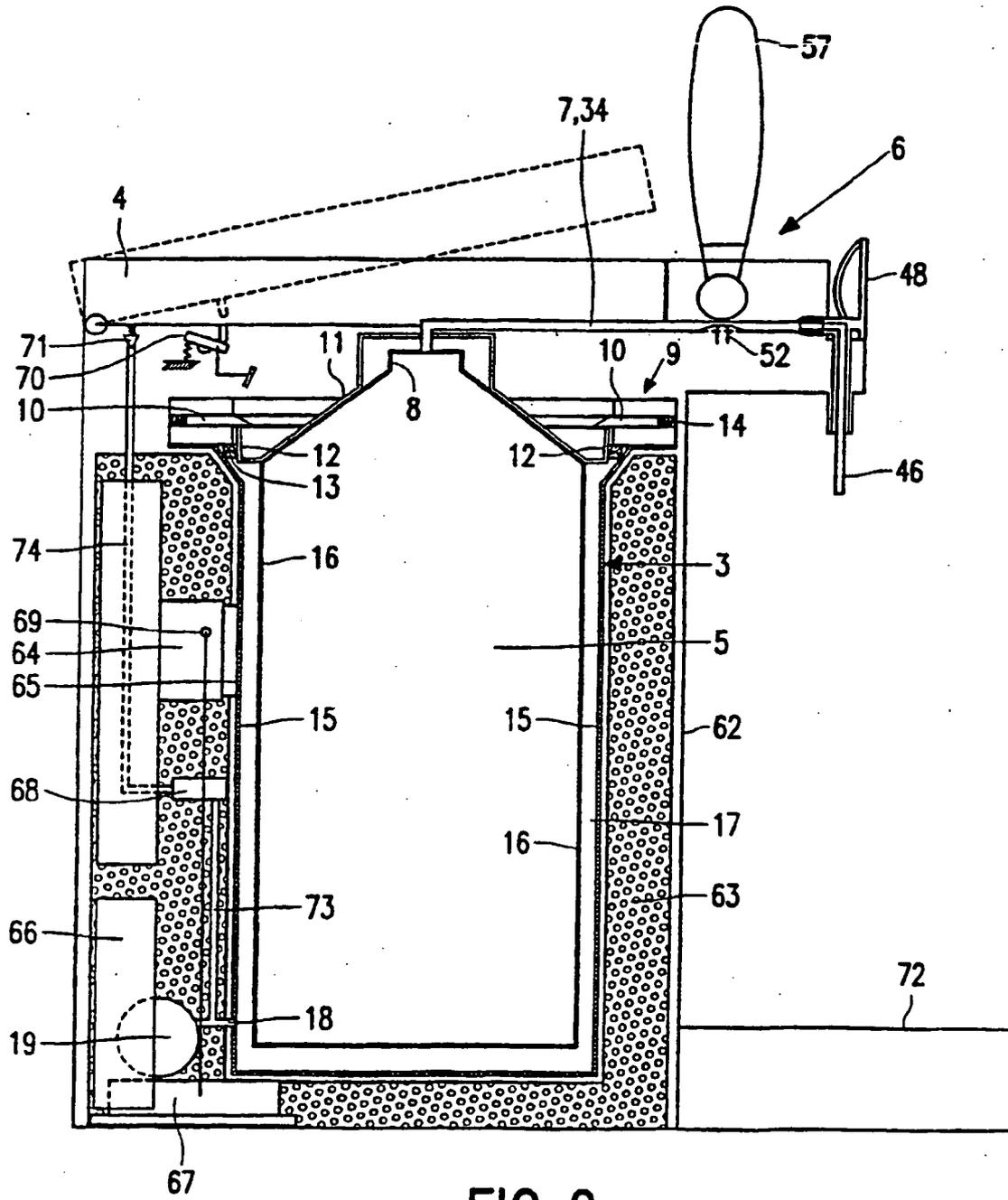


FIG. 2

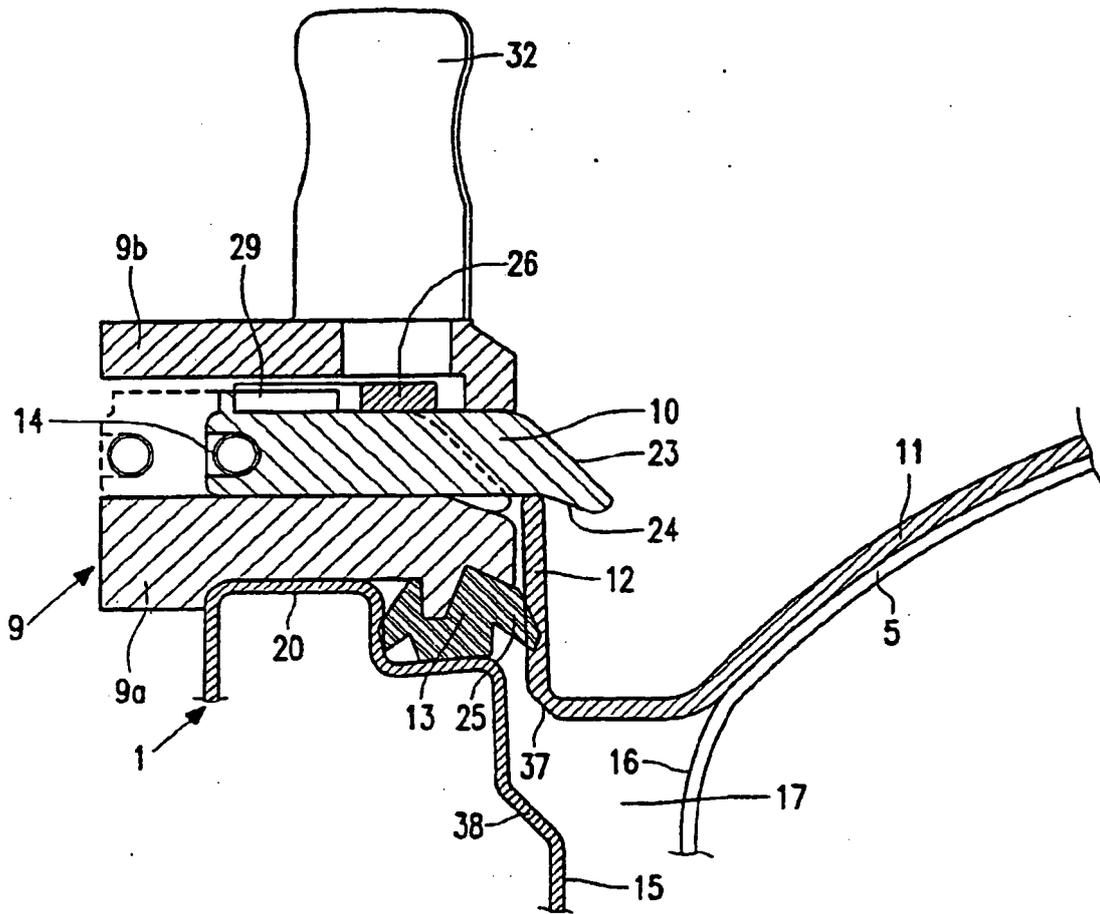


FIG. 3

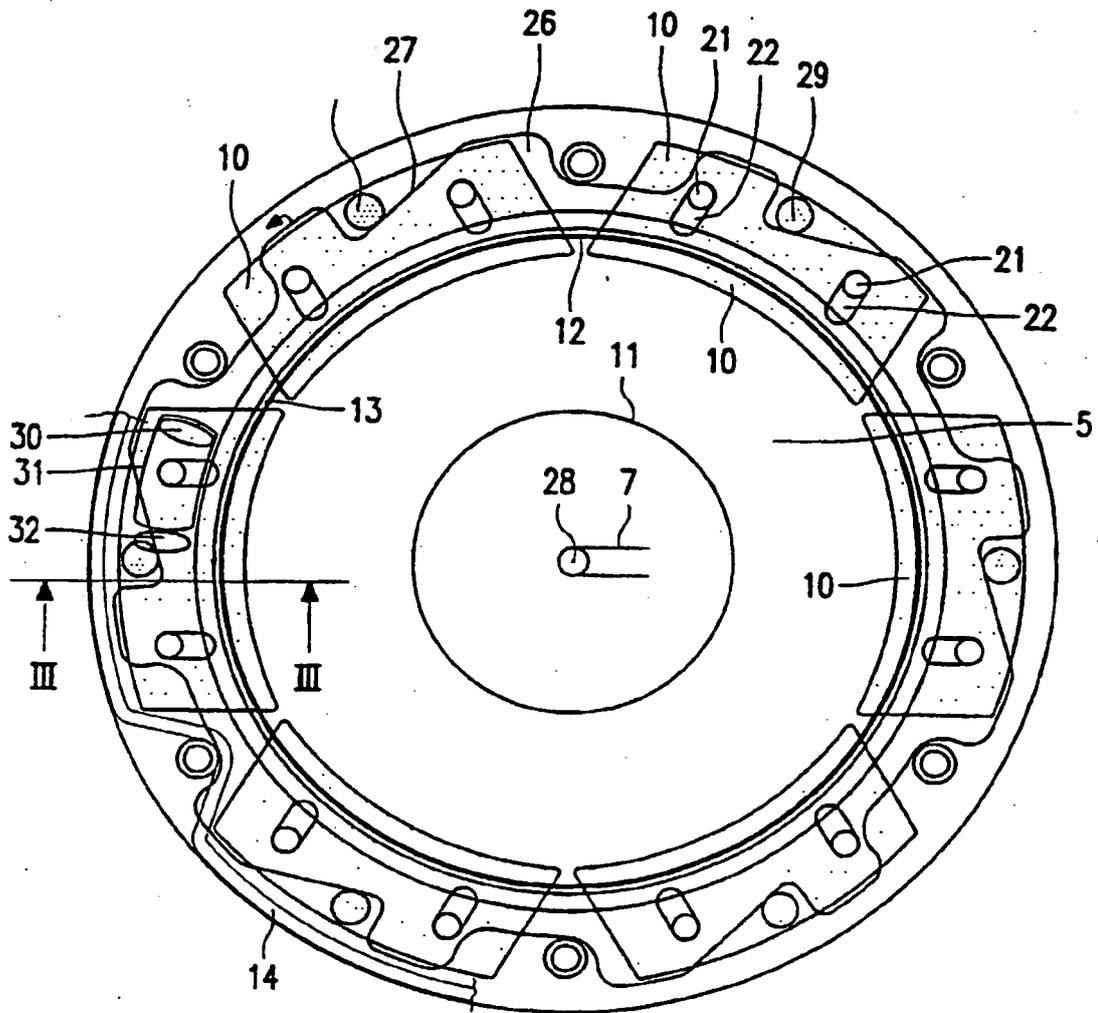


FIG. 4

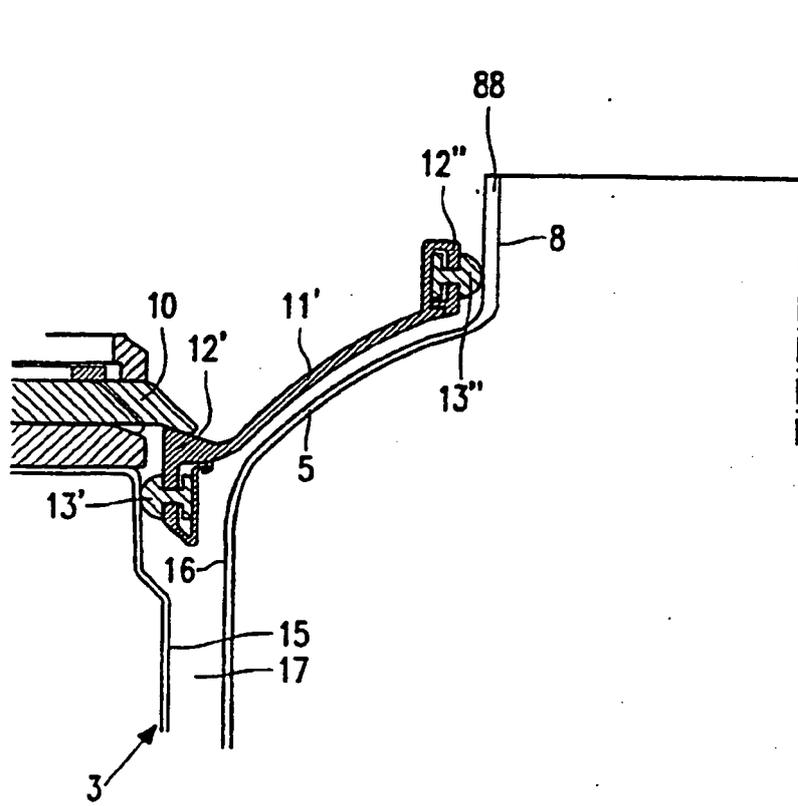


FIG. 5

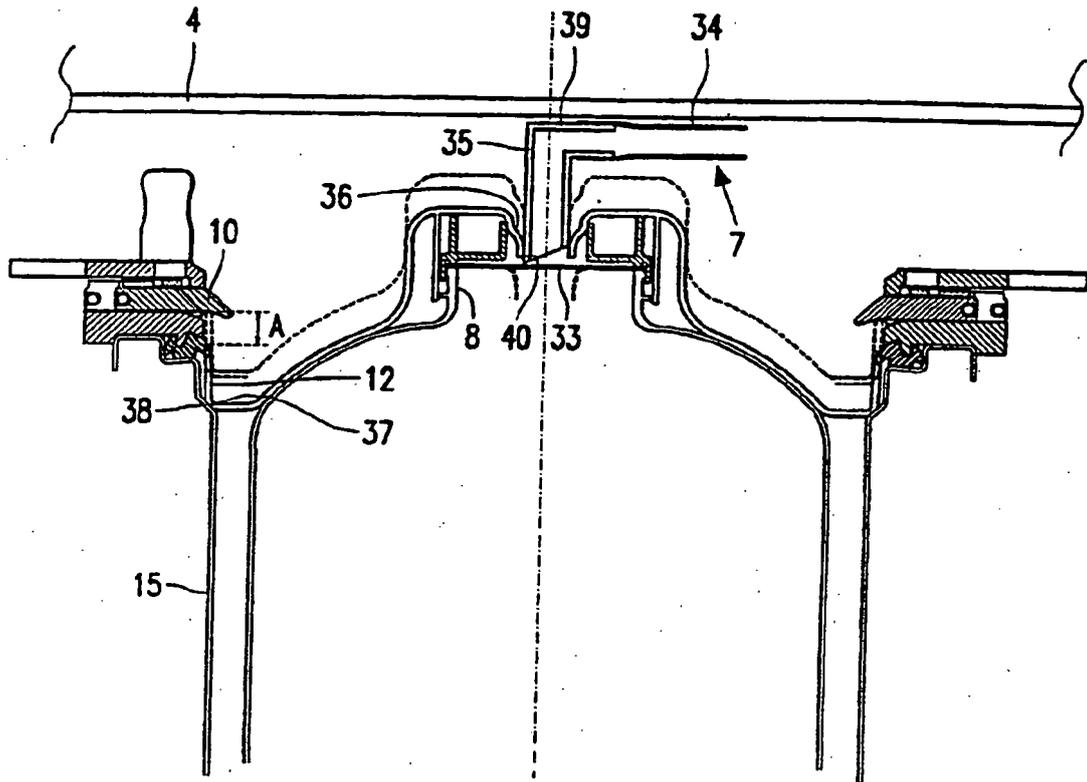


FIG. 6

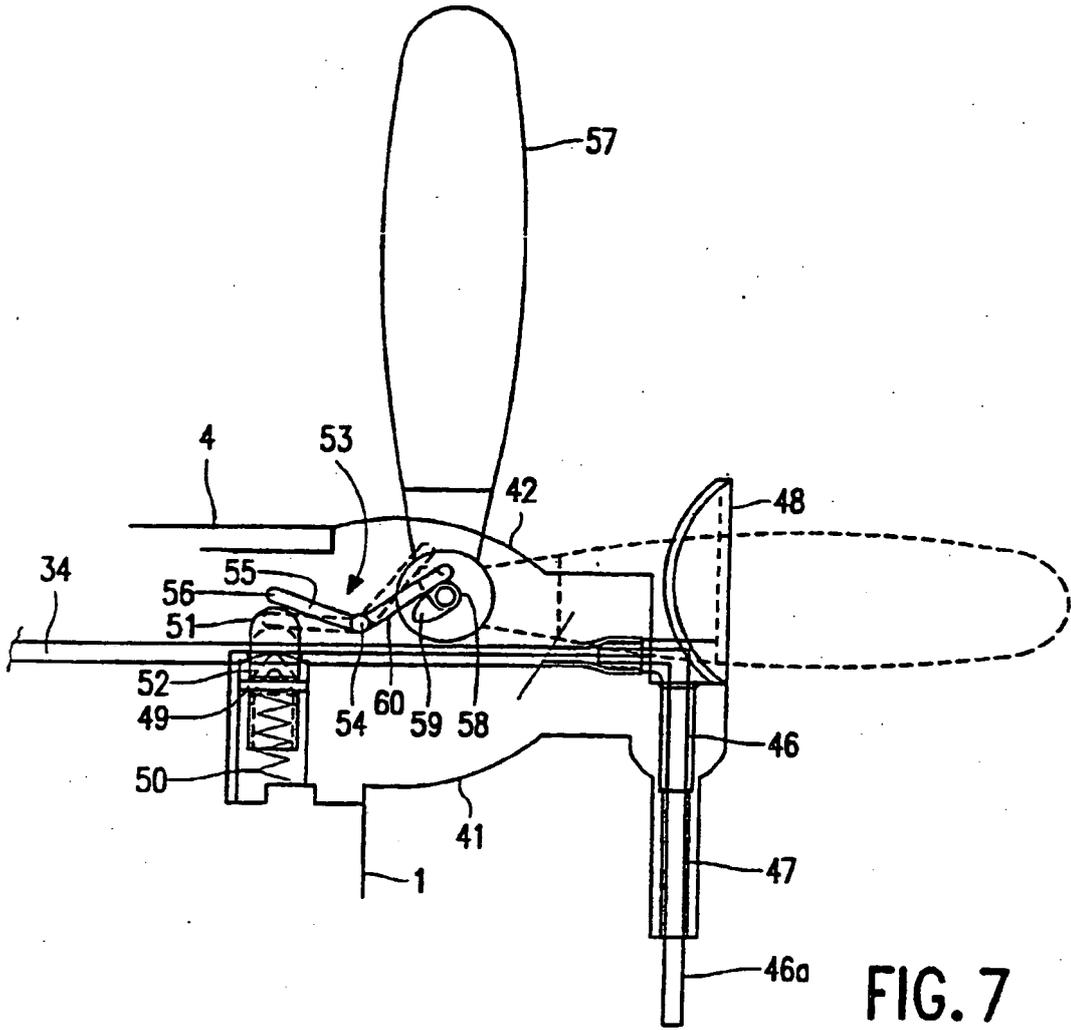


FIG. 7

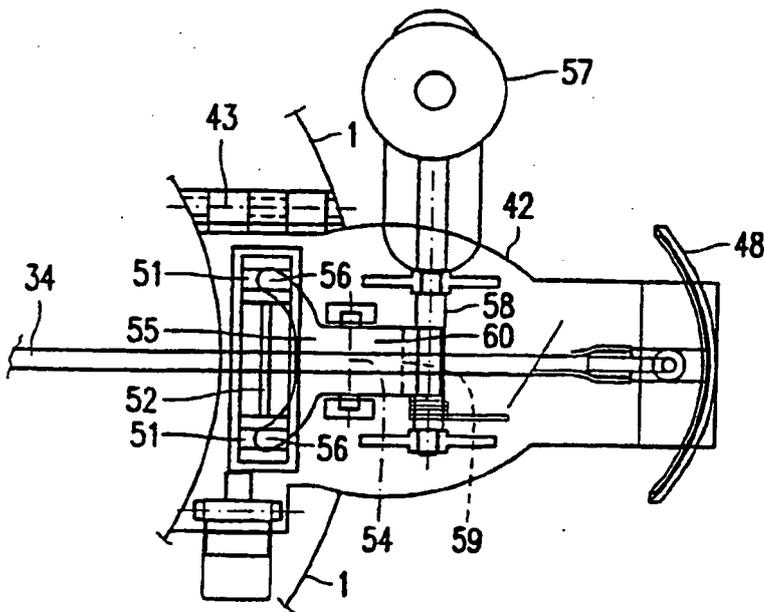


FIG. 8

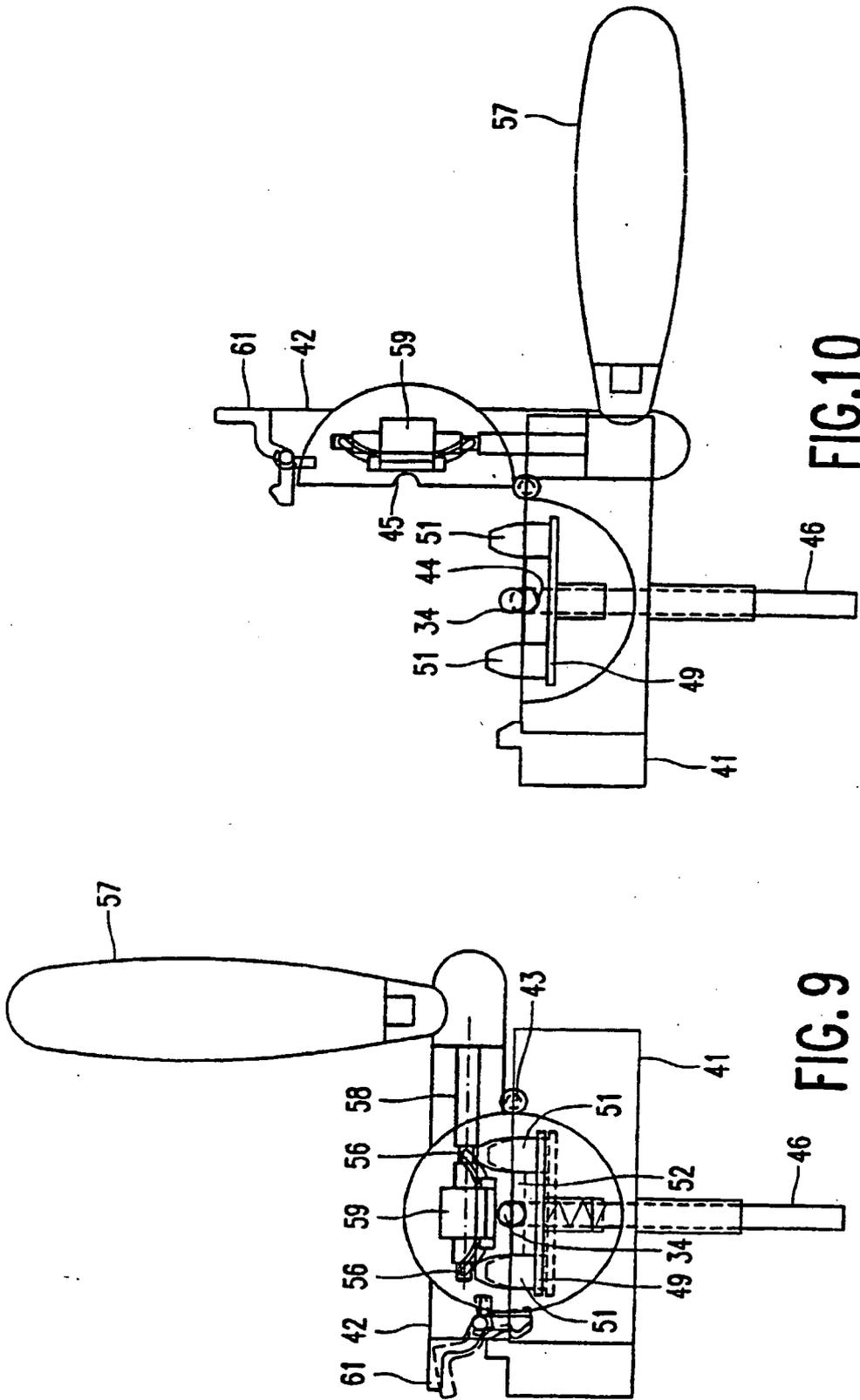


FIG.10

FIG.9

REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

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