LETTERS

Horatio Alger clap trap

It was hard to believe that you had actually published the rash, reactionary editorial in the June PHYSICS TODAY. At a time of crisis for the physics profession, brought about by an unenlightened lay Congress and administration, you choose to line up on the side of the ignorant and against the interests of the people and the science you purport to represent.

Being one of those who wrote letters about the employment situation that were quoted out of context in your editorial, I would like to point out to you that the issue here is too serious to be greeted by this peevish response to some direct or implied criticism of the American Institute of Physics and its officers.

With regard to some specific points in your editorial: Is it "ludicrous" for a PhD in physics to ask of society that he be given the opportunity to do the work for which he was trained? As far as being "educated at society's expense," it seems to me that, in view of the current employment prospects especially, I have incurred an enormous economic loss in acquiring my education. However, for argument's sake, let us say that the state provided the major support for the education of *all* physicists. Then it is only right that the state get some return on its investment. Would you let me know how I could put, e.g., a year's course work in quantum electrodynamics to use in the Peace Corps? (In a typical Peace-Corps country they recently asked that even elementary-school teachers be replaced by technicians and skilled laborers.) Before people start making silly suggestions on how to bridge the gaps between the advanced and the backward, the educated and the uneducated, the rich and the poor, they should learn how vast those gaps are.

When you said that "we" do not feel that we should have to find jobs for physicists, I presume that you were speaking for AIP in large part in that immensely pompous statement. Never have it said that I suggested such an arrangement. Let AIP confine its incompetency to journal publishing. If they want to do something about the employment situation, they could, as a logical start, discontinue such perverse activities as recruiting unsuspecting students into physics in the face of an employment depression. In addition, they could conduct, with a critical attitude, investigations into the nature of the sources of support for physics research and make suggestions for alternative sources. If anything is to be learned from the present hard experience, it's that the supporting foundation for physics is an unstable one.

With regard to your questions about the nonemployability of physicists relative to others and the harm in attaining a physics education today, a realistic appraisal of the situation, taking into account that physics PhDs are trained so as to attain very specialized skills and knowledge that they can apply only to a very narrow set of tasks, must lead to affirmative replies.

The remainder of your editorial sounded like so much Horatio Alger-like clap trap. You are guilty of the practice (which is very popular among political conservatives) of using the terms "free" and "freedom" in an absolute sense when you actually are conveying only your own relative attitude about the subject at hand. As far as the beginning physicist is concerned, freedom is *also* only one side of a coin. The other is opportunity, and without it "freedom" becomes meaningless as do also the words "physics PhD."

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Ourselves to blame

The view of the June editorial in PHYSICS TODAY ("Who Finds the Job?") is a perfect example of an attitude that has contributed much to the present difficulties of physics in the US today. With such an attitude of professional leadership it should be no surprise that physicists, alone among professionals, are now feeling the effects of unemployment. In what other profession does the leadership suggest to new members that they might seek work as high-school teachers or Peace Corps volunteers? Does the author really believe that having a