

LETTERS

Less employable? Yes!

I strongly disagree with several points raised in the June editorial "Who Finds the Job?". First, the answer to the question "Is a physicist less employable than the average man?" is yes, for reasons that vary for each case the author mentions. For example, in both the nature of the work (primarily the extreme specialization) and the number of years required, earning a PhD is very different from preparing to be a high-school teacher, and it would be most unfair and unwise to assume in general that a young physicist who could find no other job would be emotionally and intellectually suited for a role as high-school teacher. Similarly, a physicist who is just leaving graduate school is far less qualified to help the underprivileged or advise the poor than someone who has spent the last four to eight years studying or practicing law, social work, vocational counseling, etc. The statement that nationwide unemployment is at a record low is totally irrelevant, unless one seriously thinks that a physicist should want to go into and can be expected to be competent in one of the areas that dominate the labor market, like truck driving, plumbing, etc.

More important is the insidious statement that a physicist's claim that he is entitled to a job leads to an "authoritarian" society, in contrast to one like ours, which "bases its social organization on freedom, opportunity, and enterprise." Even though the author may choose to regard them as cry-babies, there are many young physicists who are very bitter about the fact that a field which makes itself out as a "glamor" field cannot absorb its new members. (As recently as 1967 the American Institute of Physics informed would-be physicists that "an increasing shortage of physicists is threatening the nation's scientific progress . . . According to Dr H. William Koch, director of the institute, 'There are now 5 to 10 jobs seeking every physicist.'" By what logic does the author conclude that the only alternative to such an ironic situation is for physicists to sacrifice all freedom of choice to some unnamed "authority"?

The editorial treats questions of individual freedom in terms of a very crude, archaic kind of social Darwinism although the language is more in tune with the 20th century: "Freedom, after all, belongs to those who have enough enterprise to take opportunities when they are available." I guess the real consolation for a jobless physicist is that the right to be unemployed is one of the joys of a free society.

Reference

1. New York Times, 29 Jan, 1967.

WILLIAM LOCKERETZ
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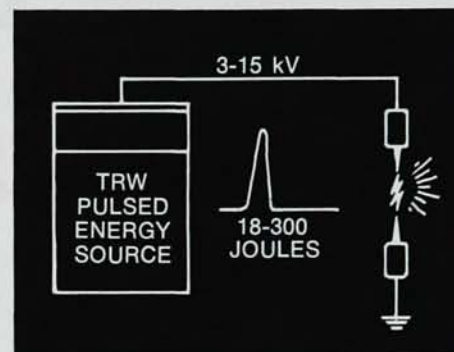
On academic freedom and tenure

To those of us physicists and physics teachers in educational institutions, academic freedom is, and should be, a matter of vital concern. The 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure written jointly by the representatives of the American Association of University Professors and the Association of American Colleges is the best existing document. It promotes "public understanding and support of academic freedom and tenure and agreement upon procedures to assure them in colleges and universities." This document considers freedom essential to research, teaching and learning in an academic community. Tenure is construed primarily as a means toward academic freedom and sufficient degree of economic security for those in the exercise of this freedom. Interpretations of the statement allow AAUP and AAC freedom to make investigations in cases where violations of the principles of academic freedom and tenure do occur. In the past, AAUP has exercised this freedom in a commendable manner to bring about betterment of policies and practices in our institutions of higher learning. Anyone interested in having a copy of the 1940 statement may write directly to AAUP, 1785 Massachusetts Ave, NW, Washington D.C. 20036.

About 60 professional organizations, including the American Mathematical Society and the American Historical Association, have endorsed the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic

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