

editorial

A time to roll up our sleeves

It was only a year ago last January we observed on this page that the beginning of the 1970's would be remembered as the time when physicists had to tighten their belts and learn to get along on more austere budgets. We have spent the rest of the year coming to realize just how much of an understatement this prediction was. On page 91 we report on a panel discussion on employment problems at the New Orleans APS Meeting at which H. William Koch, director of the American Institute of Physics, voiced concern about a serious depression in physics unless the government can soon implement a unified science policy. From this same discussion we report comments by OST official Carl York implying that the government is prepared at this point simply to abandon the generation of physicists now graduating. York's prognostication that increases in the government's support for academic research will in the foreseeable future be held to something like 6% a year means that, with inflation taken into account, the real money available for academic research in all disciplines will show no increase. His further prediction that it is likely that physics itself will see an even smaller increase in annual support offers no hope for an early change in the current employment picture in which large numbers of newly graduating PhD's can not find positions in physics.

At the above-mentioned panel discussion Wallace Brode, past president of OSA and ACS, appealed for special funds to set up a "holding pattern" to salvage the investment the country has made in the highly trained scientists who now find themselves in the surplus bin. There is little evidence from York's remarks or from other spokesmen that the government will make any such emergency funds available for physicists and other scientists.

The only alternative open to the physics community is to roll up our sleeves and mobilize our own resources to do everything possible to find meaningful jobs for those of our profession who are unemployed. A concentrated effort is needed to search out opportunities that could be available to physicists for training or work in other fields or even other countries. The American Physical Society has acted in a farsighted way by making a grant available some months ago to spearhead this kind of effort. The grant has enabled the American Institute of

Physics to hire a special placement consultant (see page 92) whose job it will be to identify important activities in foreign fields in which the analytical abilities of physicists could (perhaps with some additional training) be put to good use. He will then attempt to work out specific programs with government agencies or other sponsors in the areas involved. Fields that look like promising sources for these kind of opportunities include model-cities programs, transportation, environmental science and ocean science—all involve interdisciplinary efforts in which people trained in physics could contribute in an important way.

Although no one is saying that these "bush-beating" efforts will find a job for everyone who needs one, the hope is that they will at least be able to cushion the shock of the extensive cutbacks in government funding.

At the same time we will be hoping for the appearance of a unified science policy from the government that will provide for the long-range planning needed to avoid both scientific manpower surpluses, such as we are faced with now, and manpower shortages, such as the government's own Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts for 1980.

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