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letters

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The true dimensions of the problem can be described as follows:

► Initial aerospace and defense cutbacks (huge in terms of purchasing power) have been replaced in government budgets by expenditures involving a much smaller proportion of physicist's salaries.

► Disenchantment in industry with R&D, helped along by the carping criticism of "instant ecologists," Naderite fanatics, and the nationwide switch in emphasis from long-term planning to short-term results, has been proceeding apace.

► At reduced levels of effort, overhead and administration takes up more of the R&D budgets, leaving even less for physicists.

► Mainly in government, but also in industry, R&D executives with a degree are seeking to survive personnel cuts by returning to the lab. As their rank will usually make this attempt successful, a net influx to physics from administration results.

► A substantial fraction of physics manpower is employed in serving other physicists, in the instruments industry, reference services, and to a small extent in scientific societies, allowing a low-gain chain reaction to proceed.

► But the really explosive unemployment chain reaction is that provided by the universities. Less jobs eventually mean less students, and given the financial situation of the universities this means less professors. But for the smallest likely cut in the number of students, the number of surplus professors is enough to take care of all the jobs the remainder of the students aspire to. Whoever wins in that competition, physics loses.

The postdoctoral holding pattern, not meant for prolonged situations, has almost outlived its usefulness as a buffer. New employment opportunities, unless you are talking of the Harvard PhD's now working in garbage collection and as a charwoman here in Boston, will not exert a measurable influence. Notice periods, compulsory vacations, use of physicists as their own technicians and secretaries, have already given us all the time delay they can. Unemployment will therefore now start in earnest.

THOMAS HIRSCHFELD
Block Engineering Inc
Cambridge, Mass.

Breakdown of reason

Reading W. David Shambroom's rather incoherent letter in the August issue, (page 11), one wonders whatever happened to reason at Harvard? Shambroom studiously ignores the

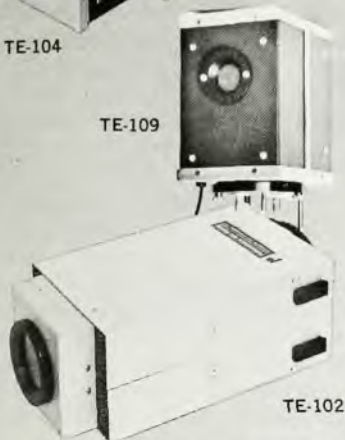
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content of the letter he is supposedly analyzing, and instead spouts ecstatic clichés uncritically about an “increasing political consciousness” (Consciousness III, no doubt), and fanatically equates criticism of extremism with “dehumanization of society,” ending with a self-parodying call for “something more sane and constructive.” Dear me!

Recalling the remark of one of Stephen Potter's characters, “You can't argue with a fog. Or a marshmallow,” I won't even try to break into Shambroom's recitation of slogans. Instead, let me follow up Gary W. Stupian's excellent letter (January, page 9) by issuing a call for careful study of the manifest breakdown of reason, in the name of progress, observable in some of our most prestigious universities, and of the stampede of many scientists toward this position, despite its suicidal implications.

Such a study, I hope, would provide the insights necessary to reverse the ideological death-wish (so identified by James Burnham and by Malcolm Muggeridge) that has been sweeping our nation lately. It is high time, I submit, to reject firmly the simplistic dogma equating “social concern” with ultraliberal/crazy-left politics, and to look at the hard realities lurking behind the euphoric slogans one hears among the self-styled advanced thinkers before it is too late.

TĀLIVALDIS I. SMITS

*The Catholic University of America
Washington, D. C.*

Peking University

May I point out that Peking University is not “formerly called Yen-ching University,” as cited in the caption under Chen Ning Yang's picture on page 61 in the November 1971 issue.

Peking University is a national institution, whereas Yen-ching University was a missionary school, which has been closed since 1949. Its campus has since been taken over by the National Peking University, which is the reason for the confusion.

S. J. Hu

*Ampex Corp.
Redwood City, Calif.*

The Cavendish today

I very much enjoyed reading Samuel Devons's article “Rutherford and the Cavendish” (December, page 38), which arrived just as I was editing the report of my Sabbatical stay at the Cavendish this past year. His description of life at the Cavendish in the 1930's would still be quite accurate today, although it may change now with the retirement of Nevill Mott as the Cavendish Profes-

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