

Letters

The Draft: Why Not Everybody?

Robert A. Gross is right in being disturbed at the drafting of someone who is in the middle of gaining a Ph.D. ("Drafting of Ph.D. candidates," Letters, 18 March). Donald A. Windsor is right in objecting to treating Ph.D. candidates in a special manner ("The draft: why not Ph.D. candidates?" Letters, 29 April). Calling anyone who prefers to stay out of the service a draft-dodger surely doesn't help, but the argument does point out a serious problem which the country should face. The draft is so grossly undemocratic in its selection procedures that this, probably more than any other reason, is the cause for much so-called draft-dodging.

Those bright, but not docile conformist, students whom Windsor thinks the Ph.D. sieve is missing are the very students who are most adept at slipping through the draft sieve also. They are, I hope, the ones who are raising the important issues on the campus, the streets, and in the press. Though they may appear not to care about success in our society they know only too well that 2 years in the service is comparatively lost time and should be avoided by taking advantage of all the loopholes in the law. . . . To a 20-year-old, 2 years is 10 percent of his life. . . .

Why kid ourselves and claim that serving is a privilege and honor? Most Americans should and do think it is an unfortunate necessity—hopefully for somebody else.

JOHN FRIEDMAN

236 Walnut Street,
Brookline, Massachusetts

I see no reason why going to school should exempt anyone from the draft. I have seen young men hang around schools, spin out their lives avoiding the draft, and waste far more than 2 years dodging around to escape an honorable obligation. And the proposition of taking tests, ostensibly to prove that one has a somewhat higher I.Q.

than one's fellow citizen, strikes me as being ludicrous. No less a man than James Bryant Conant long ago unequivocally turned thumbs down on any proposal to exempt anyone from the draft on any sort of "intellectual" basis. I think that no form of university attendance should provide protection. In France, even monks were drafted to fight, fly planes, man battle-ships. They were not allowed to hide behind monastery walls.

As an orthopedic surgeon and an adviser to the state draft board, I see too many attempts to use trick knees, flat feet, and other drummed-up disabilities to avoid the draft.

E. PARNALL

1 Medical Arts Square,
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Windsor seems to believe that some years of interruption in the budding scientific careers of our doctoral candidates would work no serious damage. On the contrary, such a devitalizing gap in areas of research and instruction could not but result in harmful setbacks. No economic or technical advances can be realized without a strong and extended backlog of experimentation and academic research.

Any nation dedicated to maintaining its position of leadership in today's goals of civilization must carry forth its efforts on all frontiers—military, to be sure, notably in times of stress and emergency; but also in industrial and commercial areas and in the continuing advancement of culture, training, and higher education. Without continuing advances across its whole front, a nation will indeed regress. Thus the talent and special abilities of all must be promoted toward their maximum goals.

A candidate for a degree which will enable him to accept his full responsibilities in any vital facet of our civilization thus earns his keep by continuous and vigorous preparation.

DENIS L. FOX

Box 109, La Jolla,
California 92037

In his editorial of 1 April, Wolfe makes the point that there are too many strings attached to the ways in which graduate students may spend their time when working under federal sponsorship. The students suffer from the inflexibility that is imposed upon the ways in which the universities can "use" them.

I think a study should be made of ways to resolve this problem by somehow severing the connection between the funds received by an individual student and those received by a university—which most often in practice today means one professor.

The G.I. Bill should be considered as a possible model, with some obviously necessary modifications. To my mind, this bill was the greatest thing that ever happened to many of us because we were allowed to pursue a course of study without being "used" or subjected to the favoritism of any single professor or department. A student had to follow a course of study and maintain his grades, but he did have a choice of making at least one change in objectives if he so desired. No one professor could "gun down" a student who pretended to independent directions or who for any reason might have given the impression that he did not want to play the role of errand boy or lackey.

Today's procedures nurture the practice of professorial paternalism to unreasonable bounds, and a student either is (and remains) a good boy or he has "had it." The student's choices become about as varied as those following an enlistment in the military; once he makes his initial commitment, either he successfully goes all the way (the prescribed way), he becomes a casualty, or he develops a quasi-honorable sore back or dependent mother and gets out. Academic freedom is essential for professors; somehow it is being considered less and less important for graduate students.

ROGER REGER

244 North Ellicott Street,
Williamsville, New York 14221

Underdeveloped Science: A Cause

Discussion of the role of science in underdeveloped countries ("Support of science in underdeveloped countries," Editorial, 25 March; Letters, 13 May)