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.

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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 battleships. 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.

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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 retrogress. 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.

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Academic Freedom for Students

In his editorial of 1 April, Wolfle 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.

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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)

would not be complete without some mention of the strong and usually successful measures taken by the governments of these countries to prevent the spread of science in them. These measures are seldom known to the stay-at-home American scientist, or to the casual visitor. While inhibitory policies exist in all aspects of science, the ones applying to tangible goods such as scientific instruments are the most easily and objectively treated. A prime tool is the import tariff, which can run 200 to 300 percent. Underdeveloped countries do not produce any significant variety of scientific instruments themselves, so almost everything used must be imported. Hardly anybody ever pays such tariffs, of course; the rest do without, or spend a lot of time lobbying to get an exemption. Only a few exceptionally energetic or prestigious individuals in a few leading institutions succeed with the exemptions, and frequently wait years even then.

Another effective tool is currency controls, which can add several hundred percent in cost, years of delay, and kilograms of paperwork. These often apply even to people who have the tariff exemption.

A third tool for the exclusion of scientific instruments from the underdeveloped country is much less obvious but comparable in effectiveness: the restriction of importers and dealers in such goods. The scientist in a large advanced country, who can get a surprising amount of sophisticated instrumentation into his lab for purchase or trial tomorrow by a phone call today, and most of what he needs in 30 days, finds it hard to imagine a situation where no example exists in his country of an instrument he wants to see, where he has to buy it irrevocably just for a look, where purchase may take years if it is possible at all, and where he has to fix it himself if it misbehaves. The manufacturers are eager for stock, demonstration, and repair, and a number of dealers in such countries are able and willing, but both are prevented by government regulations. How do you even learn the existence of new instruments under such conditions?

Such inhibitions on the tools of science lie on a continuum, with a rank order which correlates closely with degree of underdevelopment. At the top we find countries like Sweden and Switzerland, with modest tariffs generally under 10 percent, free currency convertibility, and strong distribution organizations with stock for sale or demonstration, and repair. Just below we find the United States, differing only in somewhat higher tariffs, up to 25 or 50 percent, but with automatic exemptions for many institutions. Further down lie Spain and Italy, where each item must be imported directly by the user in his own name, under letter-of-credit terms, but where the dealer structure is still strong and most unpleasant details are handled promptly and expeditiously by them. Further yet, in most of Latin America, we find the wild tariffs, incomprehensible currency controls, willing but impotent dealers, very little equipment, and scientists helpless to do the work they want. At the bottom, in Asia and Africa, only the most sensitive antennae pick up any signal at all, and any purchase of modern instrumentation has more to do with miracles than with science, even though the country may be shelling out plenty of hard currency for other commodities, have institutions for research and higher learning, and have some educated people in it.

If the governments of the countries concerned could be persuaded just to get out of the way, the needed equipment would flow in.

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Sophistication, Old and New

Let Engel and Catchpole (Letters, 25 March) come into the 20th century. All their examples of the pejorative use of the word "sophisticated"—by Burke, Dryden, Emerson, Disraeli, and, with a final flourish, Pope—are certainly enjoyable, but they are linguistically as dead as their distinguished authors. The *American College Dictionary* gives as its first definition of "sophisticated": "(of a person, the ideas, tastes, manners, etc.) altered by education, worldly experience, etc.; changed from the natural character or simplicity; artificial." As its second: "adapted to the tastes of sophisticates: *sophisticated music*." And only as the last: "deceptive; misleading." The one antonym listed is "naive."

Dear Messrs. Engel and Catchpole, leave archaisms lie; or, better yet, leave them to the unsophisticated.

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