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Strength Through Union

One of the most serious, if not one of the most spectacular, tasks for science is that of keeping its literature accessible. In the more leisurely days of the past the problem of communicating results was met largely through the efforts of scientists themselves: they organized abstracting and indexing services for their particular fields either on their own or with some foundation or governmental support.

But with the growth of science the task has become more formidable. For example, *Chemical Abstracts*, which covers the world literature in chemistry, abstracts about 100,000 articles per year from about 7500 journals, 2000 books, and the patents of 22 countries. The future holds no hope for a diminution of effort. The rate of publication in chemistry has doubled every 8½ years during this century and there is no sign of leveling off yet. The volume of publication is increasing in other branches of science too. The total job to be done can be appreciated by considering that some 50,000 scientific journals currently publish about 2 million articles per year.

This is clearly the time for a reappraisal of our methods for handling scientific information. Among those who have considered the problems involved there is general agreement that we need a clearinghouse and a coordination center for abstracting, indexing, retrieving and translating. Some would have us establish a counterpart of the Soviet All Union Institute of Scientific and Technical Information, which would be entirely under Government control. Others would prefer that the entire program be operated by a private corporation under Government contract.

Still others, and we are among them, favor a combination of private and governmental effort. Two recent events have made it possible to envisage such an operation. The Office of Technical Services in the Department of Commerce, working in cooperation with the National Science Foundation, is enlarging the scope of its activities so that it may function as a center for information about foreign translations made by either governmental or nongovernmental agencies, for indexing and cataloging, for arranging for translating when translations are not available, and for other related purposes.

The other event is a consequence of a conference of the following 14 organizations in Philadelphia at the end of January: Applied Mechanics Reviews, Bibliography of Agriculture, Bibliography of Technical Reports (Office of Technical Services, Dept. of Commerce), Biological Abstracts, Chemical Abstracts, Current List of Medical Literature, Engineering Index, International Aeronautical Abstracts, Mathematical Reviews, Meteorological Abstracts, Nuclear Science Abstracts, Psychological Abstracts, Review of Metal Literature, Technical Abstract Bulletin (Armed Services Technical Information Agency).

These organizations, which annually abstract or index more than 400,000 articles and books, decided to form the National Federation of Science Abstracting and Indexing Services. This federation is in itself an important step toward the elimination of duplication of effort and toward the setting up of uniform standards in classification, terminology, abbreviations, and transliteration. But its main significance lies in its potential function as a nongovernmental agency prepared to work in harmony with the central clearinghouse in the Office of Technical Services and eligible to receive private or Federal support for carrying out its important mission.—G.DuS.

