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In Perspective

In January 1958 the National Science Foundation called together 14 abstracting and indexing agencies for a meeting to consider more effective ways of handling scientific information. The meeting was a part of the general reappraisal of our scientific resources in the wake of the first sputnik and more particularly a response to the glowing reports about the success of the Soviet All-Union Institute of Scientific and Technical Information in abstracting and citing the world's scientific and technical literature. Out of it grew the National Federation of Science Abstracting and Indexing Services, a coordinating body made up of both public and private agencies.

But this was only a first step. The National Defense Education Act of 1958, which became law on 2 September 1958, directed the National Science Foundation to establish a Science Information Service which would have the responsibility of providing for more effective dissemination of scientific information. The provisions of the act were reinforced by a presidential directive which strengthened the hand of the foundation in getting cooperation from other federal agencies in carrying out its functions.

For one thing, the U.S. Joint Publications Service is now translating three of the 13 Soviet abstracting journals. These translations are distributed to the appropriate abstracting services through the Office of Technical Services. Thus, American and other scientists who know no Russian have access to a part of the product of the Soviet All-Union Institute of Scientific and Technical Information.

For another thing, there has been a sharp increase in the number of articles abstracted, and there is better coordination among abstracting agencies. G. Miles Conrad, director of *Biological Abstracts*, estimates that in the United States, the number of abstracts and title citations of Soviet publications was 437,000 in 1957 and that it will reach 588,000 in 1959, an increase of 34 percent. In the corresponding years the figure for the Soviet Union rose from an estimated 455,000 to an estimated 480,000 abstracts and citations. (Because of temporary suspension of publications of several issues of the Soviet journals, the latter figure is somewhat uncertain.)

Neither abstracts nor citations are intended to be complete substitutes for the original articles; they serve mainly to lead readers to articles of interest. When these articles are in languages unfamiliar to a large majority of the readers, some provision has to be made for translation. The National Science Foundation has favored a two-pronged approach: translation of the more important Soviet journals in their entirety and selective translation of other journals. Eighteen months ago the number of Soviet journals translated completely was 35 (six of these projects were under NSF support) as compared with 76 today (35 under NSF support); next month another will be added, under a new arrangement: the Optical Society of America will supply to its members both its own journal and the Soviet *Optics and Spectroscopy* in complete translation for the price of a single journal.

In the past, articles selectively translated for government, industry, or universities were often inaccessible. The Office of Technical Services now publishes *Technical Translations*, which lists all available translated articles, and both OTS and the John Crerar Library in Chicago attempt to secure copies of these articles.

Thus, an American scientist now has a much better chance to find out what is going on in his field, both at home and abroad, than he did a year and a half ago. But neither the government nor the abstracting and other services can do the searching for him. He has to take it from there—G.DuS.