



## INSTITUTE

### DOINGS

We may well start in this first issue by telling how *Physics Today* came into existence. This beginning is a product of active planning which commenced three years ago. It can be said, however, that thinking toward such a magazine began much earlier.

Back about 1929, Dr. John T. Tate, among others, felt that a medium for relatively nontechnical surveys of physics progress was needed. *Reviews of Modern Physics* was started partly to provide it. When RMP developed rapidly into a highly technical journal, an "Editor's Column" of clearly written notes about important developments in physics was run, under the authorship of Dr. E. L. Hill, in *Physics* (predecessor of the *Journal of Applied Physics*). That was in 1931 and 1932. The Institute was organized in 1931, and in 1933 expanded the scope of *The Review of Scientific Instruments* to include physics notes and news. The financial strain of the depression denied this enterprise full fruition and that is how matters stood until in 1944 the time seemed ripe for a more positive step.

In that year a kind of "town meeting" of physics was held in Philadelphia under the sponsorship of the National Research Council, at which many views were freely aired about what was wrong with the organizations of physicists and what should be done about it. It was agreed that more unity was needed. The Institute's Policy Committee undertook the task of digesting the evidence and working out a concrete plan. To show with what care this was done, glance at the names listed in the General Advisory Committee. A majority has served one or more years on this hard-working committee.

In 1945 the Committee's plan for reorganization of the Institute was presented and in 1946 it was accepted. Described in *The Review of Scientific Instruments* for January 1947, the reorganization gives the Member Societies automatic membership in the Institute. Beyond reports and an annual ballot for a Board Member, however, the organization

has had until now little added significance over what preceded it.

The Policy Committee knew that unity cannot be achieved by a mere paper organization and began early to design an Institute journal suitable for circulation to all physicists. It was clear that this magazine should not be an archive of research or pedagogy, but a readable report and discussion of what concerns physics and physicists—today. This, however, left much latitude for planning and at least three different proposals were tentatively worked out—two of them to the extent even of making up elaborate dummies.

Should the new journal be a pocket-size house organ for members only, a large, elaborate layout accepting the role of authorized public informant about physics, or a compromise? The first was rejected as lacking enough interest to achieve *any* purpose, and the second as venturing into a financially and otherwise risky field more properly to be exploited by commercial organizations. The compromise was adopted. It was decided that the magazine could properly have the aims and some of the character of an organization's house organ but it also must serve the physicist and his colleagues in related fields by presenting readable reports of important advances in the science of physics itself.

After this decision was reached estimates of cost, etc., could be made and the search begun for means to launch the new publication. One subcommittee set to work to find a good editor and another to raise \$60,000 to carry the enterprise until it could support itself. Both tasks proved expectedly difficult, but at this writing we are fortunate in possessing a good editor, selected after considering at least fifty others, and in having \$26,635 toward the fund, enough to last through 1948.

Notwithstanding the great effort which has gone into planning and preparing for *Physics Today*, none of all those who have been concerned expects this first issue to be on target. We are trying to do something different from anything done before. Admittedly what we offer is a base from which a full-grown, useful periodical can develop. We must experiment. Physicists will surely approve such an approach to a problem. They can help in its solution by expressing their opinions, suggestions, and criticisms.

HENRY A. BARTON, *Director*  
*American Institute of Physics*