



Physicists have long depended upon Physics Abstracts (formerly Science Abstracts A), published in London by the Institution of Electrical Engineers, as an important aid in rounding up the literature on a given subject. Various organizations of physicists, including in a large way the American Physical Society, have joined in supporting this service. American physicists have frequently pointed out, however, that some improvements in literature coverage, indexing, and other aspects of the service would be desirable. A committee of the APS has corresponded with the publishers and occasionally sent representatives to London with suggestions.

A dozen years ago a proposed American abstracts journal was carried to the point of careful budget estimates by the American Institute of Physics. It appeared that subsidies would be needed and certain prospective donors, interested in other fields as well as physics, were speedily discouraged by the magnitude of the amounts involved. We ended up by being grateful to the British for carrying the responsibility of Physics Abstracts.

Today the problem is with us again—more urgent than ever before. Research in physics has expanded greatly in amount and it is being carried on in many more places. Much research is being reported in languages not generally studied in English-speaking countries. The many scientific journals, scattered throughout the world, are not at hand to every scientist, and if they were, who can take the time to read them in their polyglot abundance? This is where abstracting services come in.

There exist a number of journals or card indices each of which essays to guide the reader to some or all of the articles published throughout the world under classifications of concern to scientists. This is a large order seldom, if ever, filled to the complete satisfaction of anyone. We are under the impression that chemists are more adequately served than other scientists, but that it takes a backbreaking enterprise to make this the case.

What should be the scope of an abstracts journal for physicists? What periodicals throughout the

world should be covered? Should every article on physics be abstracted or is some selection desirable? What are the elements of a good abstract? In what way should the abstracts be indexed? How much cross-indexing is worth while?

The Institute has signed a contract with the Office of Naval Research to conduct a study of these problems. It is to run until the end of the coming academic year. The joint Committee on Physics Abstracts of the American Physical Society and the American Institute of Physics is acting initially as a supervisory board. The Library of Congress has agreed to extend cooperation and some working space.

It will be the Committee's job to set up a small staff and guide its study of the problem, from the point of view of the physicist-user of abstracts. The final report should include a statement of what should be done to abstract the literature of physics, an estimate of how much it would cost and, if possible, recommendations for the establishment of a self-sustaining program.

The exact line of attack on the problem will not be set until a project director has been appointed and his recommendations have been considered. In some way the needs of physicists must be determined, either by personal interviews and correspondence or by a questionnaire answered by a sufficient number to be representative. A somewhat comprehensive study will have to be made, at the Library of Congress, of the periodical literature of physics to determine the extent of coverage that is desirable. Possibly some practical tests of different indexing methods can be made.

The members of the Committee on Abstracts are the following: Elmer Hutchisson, chairman, F. G. Brickwedde, H. H. Goldsmith, George B. Pegram, H. A. Robinson, Norman F. Ramsey, and G. H. Shortley.

The Committee on Abstracts would welcome suggestions from members, addressed to the Institute office.

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