PHYSICS AND GOVERNMENT

Cost-sharing emergency

New cost-sharing legislation, recently passed by Congress, is menacing the structure of graduate-research support. Department heads and government scientists indicate that the new laws are creating intramural discord, pitting university business officers against faculties and leaving officers of government-agency programs helpless.

New rules benefit schools. For several years Congress limited reimbursable overhead on research grants to a fixed percentage (about 20%) of direct costs. Thus besides sharing direct costs with universities, the agencies were assured of another type of institutional contribution to research projects receiving agency support. A significant portion of these indirect costs was absorbed by the schools from their general income.

The universities, however, had been agitating for many years to have the full costs of research borne by the federal government. A major part of their drive was to remove the overhead ceiling. Last year, with passage of the Independent Offices Appropriations Act for fiscal 1966, Congress eliminated the 20% limitation, and the universities are now allowed to seek full payment of indirect research costs. Congress, however, added the stipulation that "none of the funds provided . . . shall be used to pay . . . an amount equal to the entire cost." The new ruling has increased the cost per project by about 10% (in some cases 20% to 30%) but the funds available to the agencies have not increased that much.

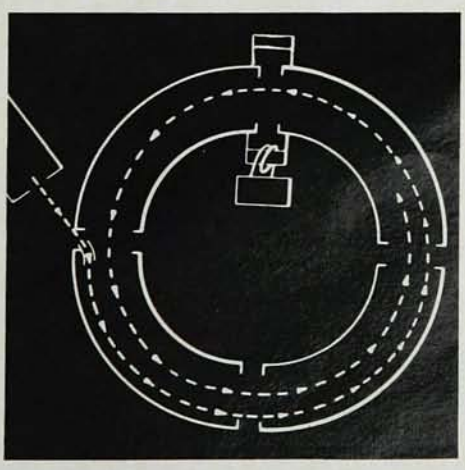
The growth rate for university physics-research support by federal agencies for fiscal 1967 has been estimated at about 7.6% (PHYSICS TODAY, March, p. 55)—a figure less than half the growth rate that the Pake report indicated as necessary to support physics research in the colleges and universities. Thus, the new ruling exacerbates an already critical situation and leaves the agencies with less money than before to support research.

This ruling, coupled with pressures to spread the support, leaves federal program officers in a quandary. Should they drop some projects to provide the extra 10%? Must there be a moratorium on new projects? Can they provide support for young physicists, particularly those at mature campuses? Should the relative cost of projects be made important in the decision process? University scientists, more concerned with the growth of science than with the extra funds for their campuses, are deeply disturbed.

"The new ruling is a disaster," said one physics-department head. "They're taking the food out of the mouths of my graduate students." "A totally impossible situation," said another.

One option under these circumstances is for university fiscal agents and state research foundations to accept a new responsibility and not claim the full overhead costs. Some active department heads are imploring their fiscal counterparts to act with restraint and turn away from this insidious gift horse offering full-overhead reimbursement. But the state universities and their research foundations will in turn be under considerable pressure from their state legislatures and comptrollers to exact the maximal sum under the law.

Situation thus far. Since the new ruling went into effect on 1 March, some state research foundations and universities have suggested that they will consider sharing overhead costs if they observe that the new rules disrupt university research. Others give no such guarantee. Federal program officers have reported that, in general, the more responsible institutions that were coöperative on the cost-sharing issue in the past have continued to be so; only a few have failed to recognize the crisis.



Cosmotron SOS

As final plans are laid for scaling down the Brookhaven Cosmotron for its ultimate demise, a search is under way to locate those sustaining funds that the Atomic Energy Commission, in its budget, had denied the venerable but still vigorous machine. Meanwhile nuclear-structure physicists whose research directly depends on the 3-BeV, 0.1-μA facility are shaking up a storm of complaint and criticism, not the least of which is directed toward themselves and their own neglected opportunities.

Efficient termination. When AEC directed Brookhaven National Laboratory to shut down the Cosmotron by July 1967, BNL sent out to all Cosmotron users a "Dear John" letter informing them of the fateful decision and asking how maximal use could be made of the machine in the time remaining. A detailed plan has now been devised, and beginning 27 June the facility will drop back to 15 shifts, 5 days a week (pending AEC approval) from its usual pace of 21 shifts, 7 days a week. Some of the personnel are now being transferred to other areas of the BNL accelerator department, and the remainder will be moved to other activities about the end of this year.

"It's like trying to sell a second-hand article," says T. Keith Glennan, head of Associated Universities, who is attempting to solicit other sources of Cosmotron support. "They ask me, 'Why should we pick up distressed merchandise?'" So far Glennan has made two or three passes both in government and on the outside, but he is not sanguine about the prospects. Another AUI scientist close to the situa-