editorial

Introducing more physicists to industry

This month's issue (page 75) carries an announcement of a new opportunity for recent PhD's—the Industrial Postdoctoral Fellowship authorized in February by the Council of The American Physical Society. In APS-president George Pake's words, the new fellowship is "intended to encourage both industry and physicists to apply physics in circumstances where its utility may have been overlooked heretofore."

Currently there are many postdoctoral fellowships available to physicists at universities and government laboratories, but very few available in industry, despite the rather widespread feeling that graduate education in physics should provide more motivation for a career in industry. The emphasis will be on awarding the new fellowships for work in industrial laboratories where relatively few physicists have been employed in the past, including large companies where a strong research and development effort exists in other fields of science or engineering, and smaller organizations whose technology could benefit from the work of a physicist. The fellowships could also be a convenient way for the host industry to experiment with interdisciplinary collaboration with its scientists or engineers without the long-term commitment required for a regular employee.

Joseph Burton, the administrator of the new program, observes that it is quite encouraging that some two dozen companies have already expressed an interest in the program and feel they have a suitable opportunity for a postdoctoral physicist. These companies include the chemical, steel, copper, forest products, rubber, business equipment, household products, instrumentation, and textile industries, for example.

Given this enthusiastic response from industry and a sufficient number of qualified and highly motivated applicants (the deadline for applications, 31 March, is just closing as we go to press), the success of the program will rest with the ability of the Selection Committee (chaired by Norman Ramsey) to match physicists with the industrial opportunities most likely to elicit a significant contribution on the part of the Fellow.

If APS's first efforts in this area prove successful, one can envision that the Industrial Fellowships program might be considerably expanded if appropriate sources of sponsoring funds can be found. Then the number of opportunities for postdoctoral appointments in industry could approach those available to physicists in universities and government laboratories, enabling our young physicists to demonstrate the value of their contributions in widespread areas of industry where physicists have not worked before and leading to many opportunities for permanent employment in these areas.

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