

Physics Register

WITHIN A FEW WEEKS physicists will receive from the American Institute of Physics a questionnaire requesting biographical and professional information about themselves. The Institute hopes for a number of reasons that they will readily take the twenty minutes or so required to fill in this questionnaire without delay or hesitation.

First, the questionnaires will be kept and used by the Institute itself. They will comprise what will be known as the "Physics Register". For the first time the physicists' own organization (i.e. the American Institute of Physics and the Member Societies it serves) will have adequate records, readily available for reference, about the members of the profession. In very few other fields of human endeavor do the professional societies know so little about the interests, situations, and capacities of their members. Such knowledge is necessary for the adoption of policies and the rendering of services which are responsive to actual needs.

For proper reporting in *Physics Today* and for many other purposes the staff of the Institute would frequently like to be able to look up the biographies of members whose names are connected with elections to office or membership on Boards, appointments, awards, articles and speeches, changes of professional connections or other noteworthy events.

Second, it will be possible, with punchcard recording of the data returned, to compile valuable statistics about physicists, including their ages, their principal subjects of interest, the nature of their work and the kinds of organizations by which they are employed. The resulting information will be indispensable to all who want to contribute conscientiously to the making of wise decisions, in the government or out of it, affecting the advancement of physics in America. Decisions are going to be made on the allocation of government, foundation, university, and other funds for research and education, on proposals for universal military training, on procedures for selective service and the call-up of reserve personnel, as well as on programs intended to improve science and mathematics teaching in the high schools.

Third, it is hoped that selected material from the file of information gathered may help in the compilation of directories such as *American Men of Science* and the Directories of the Member Societies. Parenthetically, it may become possible in the future to develop an accurate, mechanized system coordinating the Physics Register with directories and even with the day-to-day handling of membership records and the mailing of journals, bulletins, and notices. Experience with the Register must be acquired before such a development can be undertaken.

Fourth, duplicate sets of the punchcards will be given to the National Register of Scientific and Technical Personnel, which it is the duty of the National Science Foundation, under its organic act, to maintain. The Foundation will in fact provide most of the financing for the Physics Register just as it intends to help finance a register of chemists through the American Chemical Society and similarly in other fields of science. The National Science Foundation will have, in the combined Register, a knowledge of numbers, trends, capacities, and other quantitative information essential to guide its actions, the use of its funds, and its policy recommendations for the stimulation of fundamental research and the training of young scientists.

Apart from these and other virtues of the Physics Register, it may interest physicists to know how and why this Register differs significantly from previous registers and rosters. The essentially new approach is decentralization—placing the initiative and responsibility on professional societies rather than on a government bureau. Under the arrangement now being set up, the government will act as coordinator and granter of funds. The societies will assemble, process, keep, and continually use the information gathered, instead of simply providing a mailing list and then forgetting the matter.

One consequence of this new "philosophy" of registration would be important in the event of a national emergency. If total war comes to the United States, every citizen is pretty sure to be involved in some kind of service or participation. At least the government will have a high power of mobilization. Being listed in the Physics Register should, however, be a great safeguard for the individual against senseless dislocation and misuse in a blind and hurried general form of regimentation.

The fact of decentralization of the new Register will do much to insure that the direction of effort of physicists in an emergency will be determined primarily by physicists. The physicists' own organization will obviously be in the best position to see that the capacities of individual physicists are used in the most effective way. Being in this Register will provide an opportunity for sensible assignment which otherwise may be lost.

During the continuation of the cold war, it is reasonable to expect that listings in the Scientific Register will be made available to the Selective Service System and to those responsible for the military call-up of reserve personnel, as a guide in the mobilization of the necessary manpower in uniform without retarding the advance of science or disrupting civilian contributions to the national strength.