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Not from Scratch

The National Defense Education Act of 1958 required the National Science Foundation to set up a Science Information Service to "provide, or arrange for the provision of, indexing, abstracting, translating, and other services leading to a more effective dissemination of scientific information, and undertake programs to develop new or improved methods, including mechanized systems, for making scientific information available." The act also provided for a Science Information Council to advise the head of the Service.

The Council and staff met for the first time early this month and agreed that the explosive expansion in the volume of research is the crux of our difficulties. The increased pace of scientific and technical research has strained the resources of established journals and libraries, stimulated the formation of new outlets, and magnified the tasks of indexers, abstractors, and translators. They further agreed that, although existing abstracting services are doing a good job, some gaps exist and coverage should be expanded; that there is far too much "unpublished research" buried in miscellaneous government and industrial reports; and that the increasing importance of the literature in Russian, Japanese, and other exotic languages requires that an extensive translation program will have to be maintained for some time to come.

Similar problems are engaging the attention of all technically advanced countries. The attempts to cope with the problems differ in different countries. Russia uses the highly centralized, governmentally controlled Soviet All-Union Institute of Scientific and Technical Information. It is now clear that we shall follow a different pattern. Our new agency will attempt to coordinate and, where necessary, to support the activities of the many public and private agencies that process scientific information. Proponents of this approach argue that it is better to build on the existing system than to start from scratch with an entirely new organization; and that a decentralized system is inherently more flexible in solving the many problems of retrieval, indexing, and mechanical translation.

The success of the new Service will be dependent upon the extent to which it is able to get cooperation from the other information agencies. Doubtless its ability to offer financial support to private abstracting services, journals, and translating services will assure their cooperation. The same factor will operate, but to a lesser extent, with the Government agencies that produce scientific information: the Department of Commerce, the Atomic Energy Commission, the Central Intelligence Agency, and so on.

In any event, in establishing the new agency, Congress has sharply increased the funds available to the National Science Foundation for information; they jumped from \$1.9 million in fiscal year 1958 to \$3.6 million in 1959; the estimated expenditure for 1960 is \$5.1 million. The way funds will be allotted within the Service for 1960 is as follows: foreign science information (mainly for translations), \$1.95 million; support for publications and reference service, \$1.5 million; research on scientific information problems, \$900,000; international scientific exchanges, \$500,000; and unpublished research information, \$250,000.

In stating that its aim is that in the future "any U.S. scientist can obtain any item of scientific information he needs, no matter where it originates," the Information Service is aiming high. We hope it hits the mark—G.DuS.