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Troubled journals

Proliferation of journals, freewheeling copying practices and rising costs are threatening the very existence of the traditional scholarly means of communication through journals. To meet the challenge, a two-year study has been begun and a leading professional society is lobbying for changes in the copyright law.

A two-year study of the whole problem of costs and proliferation of journals is being sponsored by the Ford, Mellon and Rockefeller Foundations, in conjunction with the National Endowment for the Humanities. The original proposal for the project noted that journals "have proliferated beyond anyone's ability to read and absorb"—some 10,000 periodicals in the United States alone. The study group is expected to recommend merging some related publications, improving bibliographic methods and exploring new technologies such as information networks.

Meanwhile, the American Chemical Society has warned that continued indiscriminate photocopying of present journals will lead to their destruction unless some means of compensation is developed. The ACS itself publishes 17 journals for original research and has stated its willingness to help form a "clearing house" for the licensing of copying centers and collection of fees. "We hold no objection to a scholar himself occasionally making a single copy in a non-systematic fashion for his own use in research," says Robert W. Cairns, ACS executive director. But third-party facilities, such as campus libraries, that provide these services on a mass scale should be required to collect some fees for the publishers, he contends.

Toward research communities

What will the power of the new Presidential science adviser really be and what overall trends can be discerned in the way America is conducting research? Few people would be in a better position to answer those questions from an industrial point of view than William O. Baker, president of Bell Labs and an unofficial science adviser to the last five Presidents (SN: 7/28/73, p. 52). The sometimes reticent Baker was interviewed by Rebecca L. Rawls for the July 14 CHEMICAL AND ENGINEERING NEWS.

The trend now in science, Baker maintains, is toward large, integrated research communities. "There's considerable evidence building up that innovation in the latter part of the 20th century involves a very large community of effort," he says, and this trend "seems to be intensifying." He cites the development of synthetic rubber as a classic example of such an integrated effort by experts from various disciplines brought together for a common purpose. But current government policies tend to militate against integrated efforts by businesses, he says, through their antitrust actions, patent and contract policies and actions of regulatory agencies. Specifically, he charges that "Government regulation is a key contributor to the slowdown in the development of new drugs in the past 10 years."

He doubts whether the new science adviser will have much power to change these attitudes in Government. The White House may be a "good address" for the science adviser, but Baker doesn't think he will be listened to enough to make much policy difference. On the other hand, Baker sees the Domestic Council taking a greater interest in fostering technological advancement and that this group could indeed bring about some changes. "If this science-industry-economy concept can be further developed, I think the Domestic Council might start to get the point," he says.

Concentration of resources into large, integrated facilities is opposed by some consumer advocates as monopolistic.