

EDITORIAL

By

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The industrial research library, in contrast to the academic and public library, is largely a child of the mid-twentieth century. Although a few of these libraries can be traced back into the nineteenth century, the bulk of those now existing were founded during the period from the beginning of World War II to the present.

This impressive growth is accounted for only in part by the expanding economy. Of equal significance is the fact that the rate, as well as dollar amount, of the gross national product devoted to research and development has been increasing, rising from one percent in 1947 (\$2 billion) to two and a half percent in 1960 (\$12 billion) to a predicted four percent by 1969 (\$28 billion). One reason that scientific research has become an accepted and even somewhat hallowed feature of the American scene is that it has been found to be a good investment, tending over a period of time to bring substantial net gains, either in dollars or in such priceless commodities as health. It has also become obvious that technological superiority is a necessary condition for national self-preservation. About one-half of our nation's research and development expenditure is for military products. Of course many of the military-inspired discoveries are found eventually to have civilian application.

Another reason for the increase in size and number of industrial research libraries is Federal subsidy of industrial research. Although the government provides about one-half of the nation's total research and development money, it spends only about fifteen percent of it, preferring, whenever practicable, to pay private organizations to carry out under contract such research is required. The result is that industry, even though it provides less than one-half of the nation's research funds, spends about three-fourths of them. This policy helps to feed Federal revenues back into the economy and enables the government to have the advantage of specialized industrial know-how and equipment. At the same time it enables the government to continue to coordinate national defense at the Federal level, and to see that research is done which is important to the welfare of the people, but does not show sufficient promise of immediate financial profit to enable private enterprise, which must make money to remain solvent, to undertake it without subsidy.

It is not surprising that this growth of industrial research libraries has brought to their librarians a number of problems. Notable among these "crises" are obtaining more and better qualified special librarians (there is considerable disagreement both as to how best to train them and what to call them) and maintaining mastery over an expanding, increasingly multilingual, highly technical mass of rapidly obsolescing information stored in a variety of non-book forms. However, if there were no problems to solve, librarianship would be a dull profession. Industrial research librarians would rather wear out than rust out, wouldn't they?

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