

NEWS and VIEWS

Unanswered Questions

A NEW experimental venture in the information field has recently been undertaken by the Intelligence Division of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research. A bulletin entitled *Unanswered Questions*, the first two issues of which have so far appeared, is being made freely available to interested organizations and individuals in Great Britain and overseas. The purpose of the new bulletin is twofold. As the title suggests, it is hoped through the medium of *Unanswered Questions* to obtain answers to specific scientific and technical questions when the normal processes of searching have apparently failed. Readers of the bulletin are invited to supply any information which may help to answer questions listed in the bulletin and also to submit questions of their own. Where the questions can be answered from sources of information known to the Department, the inquirer is put in touch with the source in the normal way.

Fourteen questions were listed in the first number of the bulletin, and some information was quickly received on eight of these. Attempts were then made to discover why the original inquirers had failed to find the answers. It is hoped that by studying a number of questions in this way it may be possible to collect data on the adequacy of existing methods for disseminating information. This is the second and perhaps more important purpose of the new bulletin. The success of this experiment depends, of course, on the supply of questions. It is hoped, therefore, that all who have scientific and technical questions which have not been answered by the normal process of searching will send them to the address given below. The source of any question is not disclosed. Copies of *Unanswered Questions* may be obtained free of charge from the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, Intelligence I, Charles House, 5-11 Regent Street, London, S.W.1.

Industrial Time-Study Methods

As part of its programme of research into practical problems, the Nuffield Foundation is sponsoring an independent and disinterested scientific investigation into the techniques of stop-watch time-study practised in industry to-day. A steering committee of physiologists, psychologists, statisticians and experts in management has been appointed, under the chairmanship of Sir Frederic Bartlett, to guide the inquiry; and Mr. Winston Rodgers, head of the Department of Industrial Engineering at Acton Technical College, London, W.3, has directed the first stage of the investigation, now completed. This stage was confined to testing the consistency of results obtained from existing methods of stop-watch time-study. An experiment was designed, and carried out at Acton Technical College, whereby a group of time-study practitioners, employing conventional time-study techniques, were set to establish time-values for the same operations. The results of this experiment have proved conclusively that, working under laboratory conditions with variables as far as possible reduced and controlled, the final time-values set by the practitioners showed a high degree of inconsistency. In the light of these results, the steering committee is planning further work on the inquiry, with the long-term objective of evolving scientifically valid principles of work-measurement, as an alternative to

existing practices. It is not intended, at this stage, to publish details of the results of the laboratory experiment at Acton Technical College, though it is likely that they will form part of any final report on the inquiry that may be produced. Mr. Winston Rodgers will be willing to give more detailed information on the conduct of the experiment to those who may be interested.

Social Sciences Research Register

IN the social sciences it is difficult for the research worker and those concerned with the direction and administration of research to keep in touch with the development of ideas and trends in this field, or to avoid duplication with work being carried on elsewhere. The boundaries of the social sciences are undetermined, and the data are scattered, much, for example, being the by-products of administration or to be found only in the archives and documents of public, semi-public or private organizations of all kinds. The "Register of Research in the Social Sciences in Progress and in Plan, No. 7: 1949-50, with a Directory of Research Institutions", prepared annually by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research under the editorship of Feodora Stone (pp. 174; London: Cambridge University Press, 1950; 15s.), therefore serves a useful purpose by providing a catalogue of research in progress at universities and research institutes, or which is being carried out by research groups or the learned and professional societies. Though it cannot hope to be exhaustive, and though it does not cover the research of private persons working on their own, or of commercial, industrial, political and similar bodies, the catalogue of work in progress is nevertheless very impressive, a total of 1,265 pieces of research being recorded and described. There is also a useful directory of research institutions, giving essential information on nearly sixty organizations. The register includes particulars of the work of research students proceeding to the Ph.D. degree, and this should prove a useful feature for those responsible for the work of postgraduate students. The volume is well indexed, there being separate indexes for institutions, names of research workers and subjects of research.

Productivity and Management

IN his address on "Productivity", at the recent annual general meeting of Lever Brothers and Unilever, Ltd., Sir Geoffrey Heyworth made a valuable and practical contribution by describing the experience of his firm in tackling this problem. Dealing with the human factor in productivity, he emphasized that wherever individual performance is inadequate, it is wise to look at the methods of supervision in some detail. Day-to-day procedure and the level of understanding on the part of supervisors may vary considerably. In the experience of his firm, he stated, a good manager's efforts to increase efficiency, after mutual consultation, are scarcely ever frustrated by resistance from the workers. Neither workers, nor office personnel, like to work long hours, but while they are on the job they are generally willing to work. Sir Geoffrey's firm is in a position to compare conditions in different countries because of its manifold activities, but it has not found any important differences between the workers of various European nationalities as far as willingness to work and potential performance are concerned. Generally speaking, there are two motives for the acceptance by workers of production study: namely, that it saves energy and