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The Month in Focus

Employment

LAST month Harry K. Farrar discussed some of the aspects of postwar research and the reconversion of production facilities to peacetime activities and civilian requirements. The utilization of many of the developments in science and engineering for purposes of war will require considerable effort on the part of the engineer in the adaptation of these developments for peaceful functions. Such activities will utilize the keenest thinking of which the engineers and scientists are capable. Most of the larger industrial concerns now concentrating on war production are actively engaged in planning for the day when they can return their production facilities to their normal products. There is, at present, considerable unrest among engineers and scientists employed in war activities. Many are looking for other employment which may have greater possibilities of permanency than the present. Transfer from one job to another is not easily accomplished. This is probably as it should be, for the war has not been won yet. This fact does not appear to deter men from wondering what is to become of them. Their problem is really not significantly different from that of the service men, although there is a feeling that service men will be given preference. The problem of readjustment in the employment field will not be simple, but all must remember that efficient engineering practices must continue on a high quality basis until military requirements are eased by a successful conclusion of the war on all fronts. The winning of the war in Europe may decrease many of the requirements, but certainly large quantities of supplies will be required for the early and final conclusion of war activities.

Inventory

A factor having a very important bearing on the employment situation is that of military inventory surplus. This subject is presented in the usual complete manner in the September issue of "Fortune." It has been estimated that the value of surplus goods which may possibly be of some use to civilians will amount to something over 14 billion dollars. The question arises as to how this material can be disposed of without upsetting the economy of the country. Every machine tool, truck, tractor, photographic supply and instrument sold to the

public means less to be produced and thus less manpower required. On the other hand, it would seem to be extremely wasteful to destroy such material, making it in the true sense scrap. This is certainly a problem worth thinking about for it bears a direct relation to engineers. The design of new devices which utilize the developments made during the war will require the services of a large number of technically trained men, so the surplus inventory problem may not have as serious effect on engineering personnel as it could have on general labor.

Education

The colleges and universities have been most active in the training of men for the armed forces. Relatively few men have been in training for industry. Some of the educational institutions are now receiving veterans into their courses. It is probable that the return of men from the services to the technical institutions will be somewhat slower, except for those who had not entered college prior to entry into the services. For those whose education was impeded, delayed, interrupted or interfered with because of entry into the services. Public Law 346, more commonly referred to as the G.I. Bill, provides for resumption of their education. Furthermore, those who wish to take a refresher or retraining course may do so under this bill with certain restrictions. While attending courses under this law, tuition and other fees and subsistence will be paid by the government. It is probable that most engineers who entered the services have been given a certain amount of engineering duty. However, in many cases the type of engineering has been of a different character from what the individual would practice in industry. Three or more years away from the field of engineering or science may require a certain amount of refreshment. Whether these refresher courses should be of a special nature or consist of the regular upperclass or graduate courses normally given by the college is a matter for some discussion. Certainly the man returning to industry should be brought up to date on technical developments in his field. For a period there will be two classes of technical men to be dealt with: those who have not completed their undergraduate education and those who have graduated but who for some time have been out of touch with engineering and science.