

Why in the World in Europe?

BRUCE B. BARROW†, SENIOR MEMBER, IRE

WHY in the world is the IRE organizing a symposium in Europe? This was a common reaction among those who, early in 1960, read the announcements of the International Symposium on Data Transmission, the first large international meeting to be sponsored by the IRE outside North America. This symposium manifested the continued development of the IRE as an international organization—it did not represent the *birth* of international IRE activity, though it might be seen in some respects as a coming of age.

How can the IRE, with slightly more than 90 per cent of its members living in the USA, call itself an international organization? The question may be answered by asking another. What other adjective can describe a professional society that numbers more than 6500 members outside the USA, that has local sections holding meetings on every continent except Australia, and that draws members from a dozen countries to a meeting in Holland? The Delft Symposium, which was appropriately organized in cooperation with two Dutch professional societies, attracted more than 500 participants. Ninety-five per cent of them, including more than a hundred IRE members, came from Europe. The IRE Professional Group on Information Theory has already announced its intention of holding a symposium in Europe in 1962, and it is clear that within a few years the IRE will be regularly working, either as sponsor or as a supporting society, in a full program of European symposiums and conventions.

The IRE is American, and the IRE is international. With a nonpolitical organization the two are not mutually exclusive, and this is a point worth emphasizing in a world where political divisions are so sharp. Furthermore, both aspects of IRE activity are as old as the IRE itself.¹ The founders of the Institute specifically chose a name and constitution without national preference, and sections

were operating in Canada and South America twenty years ago. What is new is the expansion in international activity, which follows not from a change in IRE policy but from the growth in IRE membership in all parts of the world.

In the leading countries of Europe there are well-established professional societies working effectively already. Here the IRE, with profit to everyone concerned, can help to obtain speakers and organize joint meetings, and can provide liaison for such large international meetings as the Delft Symposium. But these activities require a local IRE organization, *i.e.*, a section. Even in the European countries with the most vigorous and effective societies, which by no coincidence also happen to be the countries with the largest number of IRE members, there is therefore an appropriate place for IRE section activity. In such countries, IRE sections are not established as independent organizations to compete with local societies; they may, on the contrary, even be officially affiliated with the local societies.

The development of the IRE in Europe comes at a time when the European nations are busily forming ever closer ties economically, industrially, and politically. Nevertheless, although the need for better exchange of technical information within Europe is now consciously felt, it is a fact that each of the national European technical societies is handicapped by history in building a professional society for a United Europe.

The IRE can build just such a society. The various IRE sections will continue to operate nearly autonomously, free to serve wherever needed and to adapt to local conditions as appropriate. They will, in the not distant future, be joined together in the structure of an IRE *Region* (as the Canadian sections were joined long ago). The Regional Committees, automatically both international and European, will not only help to coordinate professional-society activity, but will provide a force to attack the special problems facing the new Europe. This is the challenge facing the international IRE.

† SHAPE Air Defense Tech. Ctr., The Hague, The Netherlands.

¹ For a thorough discussion of IRE history, see L. E. Whittemore, "The Institute of Radio Engineers—forty-five years of service," *Proc. IRE*, vol. 45, pp. 597–635; May, 1957.