

February 26, 1962

OPEN LETTER TO IRE AND AIEE MEMBERS

Is it possible, that in debating the only issue presented to them-- to merge or not to merge--the members of the IRE and of the AIEE are considering a pseudo-solution to their problems? Indeed, will an all but irrevocable decision to merge both institutes best serve the present and near future interests of the memberships and of their profession? May a merger leave fundamental problems urgently requiring solution virtually unaffected and perhaps raise more difficult questions than it settles? Is the frantic activity to produce a constitution and by-laws and to solve the 'mechanical' problems of merging giving us a false sense of accomplishment?

What's the hurry? Why the crash program?

Have the present memberships' interests, objectives, and problems been deliberately ascertained? By what means? Was the sampling method and the interrogation procedure soundly selected? With what confidence are the results stated?

What reorganization possibilities were considered by the leaderships? Were they all considered in light of how they might best meet the needs of the members and their profession as determined by a sound sampling and interrogation plan? By what criteria were all but one plan--to merge the IRE and the AIEE--eliminated from further consideration?

Isn't it just as well that only one organizational candidate has been presented by the leaderships for consideration since the vast majority of the members probably care very little about how the IRE and the AIEE are reorganized?

Having studied IRE President Berkner's three open letters* concerning the possible merger and having observed and reflected on reorganization of the IRE and of the AIEE, I think

(1) That merging is probably a pseudo-solution and that other alternatives would be better,

* Proceedings of the IRE, December 1961, January 1962, February 1962.

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(2) That there is no good reason for hurry; the present crash program is unsound--the analysis of the memberships' needs has been superficial, the design is ill-conceived and has been done, albeit frantically, with an undermanned and probably inadequate work force,

(3) That we don't know much with surety of the present and near-future needs of the IRE and AIEE membership and, perhaps of equal importance in this context, of the needs of members of other organizations which overlap and compete with portions of both institutes (e.g., the Association for Computing Machinery),

(4) That most of the IRE and the AIEE members are uninterested in the structure of their organizations. But this does not absolve the leadership from having the memberships' needs ascertained and having the best possible structure devised to meet these needs.

Should not the IRE and AIEE separately and jointly, find out what is needed before presenting organizational issues for all but irrevocable decisions to their members? I suggest that they stop preparing a constitution, by-laws, and other agreements for a merged IRE-AIEE, and start (with the aid of professional help) an objective study and evaluation of the present and near-future purposes, objectives and interests of their members, and ascertain how well or poorly the present organizational structure, policies, and practices are serving these purposes and interests, and attaining these objectives. Only after this is done, should each organization separately and jointly (again with the aid of professional help) select alternative organizational structures and put them to a referendum. Indeed, I would suggest that the presentation of each such issue to the members be accompanied by a statement of how the alternatives were arrived at, and of the chain of reasoning used to show how they might serve the already identified purposes, objectives, and interests of the members.

Although I am not a specialist in establishing, merging, or reorganizing professional societies, I do know that reputable* management consultants called in to study an existing organization, or to establish an organization from scratch, undertake to make certain fundamental determinations before diagnosing and recommending treatment. They ascertain whose interests and purposes the organization is to represent primarily and whose secondarily; what these interests and purposes are, how they are to be ranked, and how much of the organization's resources should be devoted to each interest. They ask what the primary objectives are of the members represented, and how well the present organization, policies, and practices implement these objectives. The members of the IRE and the AIEE should be polled by means of a professionally-designed questionnaire to find out such

* A reputable management consultant is one who diagnoses and treats to the best of his ability and states these results to his client whether or not the client wants to hear them.

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things as (a) whether they want a society that serves primarily the purposes of the electronic and electrical industry, or the purposes of practicing electronic and electrical engineers or scientists in any specialty, or in a particular specialty, or the purposes of such engineers as salesmen, marketers, purchasing agents, managers, or business men (which may be the goal of many engineers), or the purposes of anyone with an engineering degree; (b) whether they want primarily to have a learned society, scientific-technical institute, professional society, educational society, labor union, trade association, lobby, fraternal organization, or social club; (c) to what extent the society should participate in (i) setting terminological standards, (ii) setting up a code of ethics, (iii) setting up liaisons with other institutions such as universities, government, and industry, (iv) organizing trade shows, and (v) providing recruiting opportunities.

Determinations such as these will reveal what is right and what is wrong with the IRE and AIEE now, and what should be done in the future. It may indeed turn out that to merge or not to merge is truly the key issue. If that be so, the investigation might seem to have engendered an unwarranted delay. This delay will have been all to the good, however, for it will have shown how the merged organization should function--and why. Perhaps the study will show that those professional groups of the IRE and the technical groups of the AIEE with common interests should form independent technical societies; and that in turn each of these newly organized societies should form a loose grouping into a parent body called, say, the already suggested Institute of Electronic and Electrical Engineering (IEEE). This parent body might have a structure and function similar to that of the American Institute of Physics and might have a tenuous administrative and financial relationship to its member organizations and their members as does the American Institute of Physics to its member organizations and their members. If a reorganization of this kind should turn out to be best, to conduct a planned, orderly, and professional investigation now would allow the correct decision.

Many other variants may emerge from the study. I here mention only one--the consolidation of the IRE Professional Group on Audio, the Professional Group on Ultrasonic Engineering and the Acoustical Society of America. However, I feel that recombinations of this sort rather than the merger now contemplated would be the strongest candidate. In any event, I trust that IRE and AIEE members agree that we should insist as strongly on an orderly, objective and exhaustive procedure for determining the organizational structure and policies of our societies as we do in designing circuits and systems.

I suggest, therefore, that the IRE and AIEE, first separately and then together, plan and carry out a program, preferably with as much outside professional help as is needed, to determine the purposes, interests, and objectives of their members; to evaluate the present

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organizational structure, policies, and practices in the light of these purposes, interests, and objectives; and then to present to both memberships the issues and the alternatives together with their rationale.

Very truly yours,

Louis Fein

Louis Fein
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P. S.

In order to show the reader the kind of data and opinions I would expect to provide in a professional and orderly investigation, let me cite my background and biases--which may or may not be typical. I am a senior member of the IRE belonging to three professional groups: Electronic Computers, Reliability and Quality Control, and Engineering Management. I serve on the National Administrative Committee of the PGEC. I have a slight acquaintance with administrative procedures of IRE sections, with professional groups, and with the organization of technical meetings. While the average publication in my field of interest (especially the Transactions of the PGEC) are good and are getting better, the average paper presented at IRE-sponsored meetings in fields of my interest is mediocre and not getting better. In the Proceedings of the IRE, I find that about 85 percent of the material is of only marginal interest to me, and that of the other 15 percent, I read at most two or three articles a year except for special issues devoted to my fields of interest. These appear once a decade. Clearly, for me, the Proceedings are almost entirely superfluous. As for the annual IRE-sponsored international convention and RADIO ENGINEERING SHOW and the WESCON TRADE SHOW and technical convention, I feel about them as I do about the Proceedings--these three ought to benefit and interest me, but they don't--although commercial interests are doubtless extremely grateful for them. My knowledge of the organizational procedures of the professional groups consists only of knowing that the IRE has no criteria for establishing, disestablishing, or merging professional groups, and apparently feels that no criteria are necessary. The overlap of interest and competition among several professional groups is considerable.

Although I am not a member of the AIEE, I serve on its Computer Systems sub-committee. I have observed that in the computer-related fields there is little difference between IRE and AIEE members' qualifications, interests, and biases, or between the subject matter of their publications and meetings. The overlap is complete, except that the computer standardization committees of the two groups are at odds.

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