

NEWS AND VIEWS

What Next at Naples?

A REORGANIZATION of the financial basis of the Naples Zoological Station is now being considered by the learned societies which at present help to support the station by means of annual subscriptions towards the maintenance of "tables" at the laboratory. Hitherto the annual subscription has been \$3,000 a table, for some reason translated into sterling as £1,200. Under the new scheme, subscriptions would be increased by roughly 25 per cent from June 1, 1967. In addition, it is now suggested that those institutions elsewhere wishing to contribute the equivalent of 50 million lire to the annual cost of the station would be entitled to a seat on the Administrative Council which is responsible for the government of the station through its present director, Dr. Peter Dohrn. By all accounts, these proposals are welcomed by the academies principally concerned, partly because it is considered that access to the station would be good value for money even at a higher rate, and partly because a stronger international financial basis of operations would help to ensure the continued international character of the work at Naples.

Altogether, rather more than 60 tables are maintained at Naples by institutions from fifteen countries. Various Italian sources between them make up the largest volume of support (19 tables), with Germany (12 tables) and the United States (10 tables) next in order. The United Kingdom, through the Royal Society, maintains four tables. Although the maintenance of a table is chiefly a way of shouldering a share of the cost of running the station, the academies which contribute funds are also responsible for allocating places at the laboratory to people from their own countries. Naturally enough, marine biologists of various kinds account for much of the demand on facilities at the laboratory, which include an elaborate system of fishing to recover specimens and an ample supply of Mediterranean water, but physiologists and others concerned to work with fresh marine material are also drawn there. So, too, are a number of scientists wishing to make use of the splendid library at the station. Short visits of a month or so are encouraged. The station will provide basic needs, but visitors have usually to bring special items of equipment from their own laboratories. In the past few years, reconstruction of buildings at the station has been supported by government sources in the United States, the Federal German Republic, the United Kingdom and the Italian Government as well as by the Volkswagen Foundation.

Although the proposed increase in contributions is probably well accounted for by increases of costs, it is also in some quarters regarded as a defence against the view, sometimes expressed in Italy, that the zoological station should be allowed to grow into an Italian equivalent of the national laboratories such as those at Plymouth and at Woods Hole, Massachusetts. On the face of things, of course, it is anomalous that one of the most renowned laboratories in Italy should have been founded by a German (the grandfather of the present director) and should be supported by and run

for scientists from a dozen countries. Elsewhere it is argued that the station is an invaluable centre for international collaboration, possibly unique. Its value in this respect is only likely to be enhanced by the siting of an international laboratory of genetics and biophysics at Naples.

The recent history of the zoological station has also been disturbed by what are sometimes described as "labour difficulties" among the technical staff. In part, these probably reflect some of the economic difficulties of carrying out advanced scientific work in the south of Italy, and recent visitors to the station speak well of the quality of the assistance which they have received. Another frequent visitor points out that troubles of various kinds are inseparable from Naples and are "always desperate, never serious".

Squeeze on Universities

THE University Grants Committee has embarked on a programme of what it calls "rationalization in the teaching of agriculture at British universities". Although it has already provoked a brisk if predictable protest from three members of the House of Lords on the grounds that the national importance of agriculture has not been fully considered, the committee has probably fixed its eyes on a more distant target, and is probably interested to see whether it can work out procedures whereby rationalization could be carried out elsewhere in the academic spectrum.

In a letter to *The Times* on January 16, Lords Abergavenny, Cornwallis and Netherthorpe said that the universities of Leeds and Cambridge had been "invited" to give up their degree courses, and that the schools of horticulture at Reading and Nottingham are similarly threatened. These public signs of pressure seem to be the tips of a substantial iceberg. The U.G.C. says that it wrote before the beginning of the present academic year to three universities at which degree courses in agriculture were considered expendable, to a number of others at which there are schools of horticulture the independent existence of which is not thought to be essential, and to other universities where the present diversity of courses with titles such as "soil science" and "agricultural economics" is considered altogether too rich. As yet most of the universities concerned are still nursing the insult to their pride in silence. According to the U.G.C., all universities are keen on rationalization, but somewhere else than on their own premises.

The case for making a start on agriculture rests, in part, on the Bosanquet Committee which, at the end of the Second World War, considered that the production of graduates in agriculture from British universities might well be greater than the demand. The U.G.C. considers that the few deficiencies which the Bosanquet Committee pointed out have now been made good, but that the broad adequacy of production of graduates in agriculture remains. In any case, the argument goes, the plan is to concentrate teaching in agriculture on "fewer but stronger" schools. According to the U.G.C., there is no intention to reduce the numbers of graduates leaving the universities. Agricultural undergraduates have, however, been a declining proportion of the entire student body in the past decade. In 1964-65 there were 1,701 of them, or 1.5 per cent of the total, compared with 2.6 per cent