News and Views

Tariff Commission and a Scientific Policy

THE creation of a Tariff Commission, or, as it is called, Import Duties Advisory Committee, as part of the Government's general tariff plan has implications which go far beyond the theoretical merits of 'free trade' or 'protection', and are of special interest to scientific workers. As Capt. Harold Macmillan, M.P., points out in recent articles (cf. *Week-End Review*, Jan. 30, and *Sunday Times*, Feb. 14), Britain suffers particularly from the chaotic market conditions which affect all countries, because not only is a large proportion of its production for export, but also because alone among nations it has a home market open to unrestricted competition. In the absence of any protective device, British economic development is being determined not by our own decisions but by the fluctuating disorder of world trade. The old fiscal controversy having now been resolved in principle by the Government decision to apply tariffs to a wide range of manufactures, the question of practice and of the purpose for which tariffs are to be applied becomes of primary importance. It is clear that both ministers and other members of Parliament are now prepared to consider the economic and financial aspects of a tariff policy in relation to the reorganisation, modernisation, and readjustment of industry as part of a definite plan of national and imperial policy. The execution of any such constructive policy, involving the application of scientific methods in this difficult and contentious field, requires a wealth of detailed information regarding the relations between different industries, their productive capacity, efficiency, their importance in the general national economy, the merits of their plans of reconstruction, and so forth.

Scientific and Industrial Development

THIS information and the essential co-operation of industry can probably only be secured by the creation of representative councils for each of the great national industries, and in this way the Tariff Commission will be brought face to face with rationalisation problems, technical questions of scientific development, industrial organisation, and management. In addition to the technical advice of industrial representatives, the co-operation of the banks, co-ordinated, for example, through some such body as the Bankers' Industrial Development Trust, will be required, since intelligent use of the powers of the Committee involves the complete supervision of every question relating to industrial and commercial development. If the Government proposals are indeed directed towards the evolution of such a deliberately planned national economy, there will undoubtedly occur opportunities of making representations to the Commission upon the scientific position of many of our great industries the development of which is dependent upon technical control and scientific research. It is desirable that the Commission should be aware of what scientific opinion is on such great industries as the textile industry, the iron and steel industry, etc., and it is incumbent upon representatives of science to follow these developments with the closest attention and to seize the earliest opportunity of making representations or affording other assistance towards the evolution of a creative and scientific national policy.

Tariffs and Imported Scientific Books

THE text of the Import Duties Bill, whereby an *ad valorem* duty of 10 per cent is to be charged on goods imported into Great Britain, has been issued, and we are glad to see that newspapers, periodicals, and printed books, and radium compounds and ores are among the articles exempted from the impost. As was pointed out in our issue of Feb. 6, p. 195, the revenue to be expected from a tax on imported scientific literature is negligible; the only effect of such a duty would be to increase the cost of scientific research. It is encouraging to find that this aspect of the matter is appreciated in Government circles, and that, amid the many claims for exemption which have, no doubt, been put forward, consideration has been given to the needs of scientific workers. Affairs do not seem to be so well ordered in Australia. It will be recalled (NATURE, Nov. 28, 1931, p. 900) that the Commonwealth has in force a duty of 10 per cent on imported books and a sales tax of 6 per cent; this, with the depreciation in Australian money, has proved a serious handicap. Incidentally, it has demonstrated our contention that, as a source of revenue, an import tax on books is not worth consideration. However, it is stated by the Canberra correspondent of the *Times*, in a message dated Feb. 11, that a deputation including Sir George Julius, chairman of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, has waited on the Prime Minister, Mr. Lyons, who has promised to consider the exemption of historical records and scientific periodicals, although he will not consider the early and total remission of the sales tax.

Discovery and Uses of X-Rays

SEVERAL letters have appeared recently in the *Times* on Prof. W. C. Rontgen's discovery of X-rays and their early use in surgery. As NATURE is mentioned by three of the correspondents, it may be worth while to recall the association of this journal with the notices of the discovery. General announcements appeared in the daily Press on Jan. 7, 1896, to the effect that Röntgen, who was then professor of physics in the University of Würzburg, had discovered that a number of substances which are opaque to visible rays of light are transparent to waves capable of affecting a photographic plate. A note upon these reports appeared in NATURE of Jan. 16, 1896 (vol. 53, p. 253). In the issue of the following week, Jan. 23, we published a letter from Sir Arthur Schuster on the physical significance of Röntgen's observations, and Sir Arthur himself arranged for the translation into English of Röntgen's