

NEWS and VIEWS

University Education in Great Britain

THERE was a debate in the House of Commons on Government assistance for university education in Great Britain on a motion of Captain C. Smith. Captain Smith emphasized the key importance of the universities as institutions of higher learning and centres of research, and asked what is the machinery, if any, relating the expansion of the universities to the continuous long-term needs of the country for specialist professional and technical workers. The present functioning of the University Grants Committee was criticized by several members; and, apart from Mr. Wilson Harris, most members seemed to think that some further organisation is required, particularly to ensure that there is an adequate overall plan. Captain Smith suggested that there should be some form of publication of reports from the University Grants Committee, and while the importance of securing the autonomy of the universities, collectively and individually, was emphasized, there was a general desire evident in the debate that some more effective means of planning the expansion of the universities as a whole from the national point of view should be worked out. Other points raised related to the adequacy of maintenance grants made to students, particularly in view of increased fees and higher costs of living. While the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury, Mr. Whiteley, in replying, made no fresh contribution to the debate, he promised to convey to the Chancellor the various points made; and the debate at least showed that, in the present House of Commons, members are fully alive to the importance of the whole question of university development, and in touch with the proposals which have been advanced in the various reports on the subject already noted in *Nature*.

Research in Technical Colleges

A CIRCULAR (No. 94, dated April 8, 1946) on "Research in Technical Colleges" has been issued by the Board of Education; this emphasizes that the main function of technical colleges is the advancement and dissemination of knowledge, especially knowledge of value to industry and those engaged in industry, and the importance and educational value of research cannot be overstressed. Taking Great Britain as a whole, however, the total contribution in research from technical colleges has been comparatively small. The attitude of many local education authorities towards research in technical colleges appears to be somewhat negative, and the time has come to recognize that it should be regarded as a normal and important function of such colleges. In making provision for research facilities, the circular suggests that local education authorities should have regard to the suitability of a teacher, temperamentally and intellectually, for undertaking research work. If he is suitable, the teacher should be given facilities to undertake the type of research in which he is interested, including adequate equipment and laboratory assistance. The most important and suitable type of research for such teachers is applied research undertaken at the direct or indirect suggestion of industry and commerce. Routine testing should only be done when industrial facilities are not available. The results of research should be published as soon as possible after completion, subject, where appropriate, to an agreed delay to allow

the firm paying for the work to have priority in applying the results, and subject also where necessary to consideration of patent possibilities. Where fees are to be paid from outside sources, an equitable arrangement should be agreed upon beforehand as to the allocation to be made between the teacher concerned and the college authorities.

The volume and character of the research work which can appropriately be undertaken in technical colleges varies from place to place. Much will depend on the interest of the individual worker and the needs of local industry. The main limiting factor is the need to ensure that sufficient teaching service is rendered to constitute full-time teaching service for superannuation purposes. As it is in the national interest that industry should be able to obtain the best and most up-to-date scientific advice, any scientific worker or technologist serving on the staff of a technical college who is competent to act as a consultant to industry, more particularly local industry, should, the circular states, be encouraged to do so, subject to what has already been said and provided that the work does not interfere with the proper discharge of his teaching duties and that no agreement is made which would restrict his service to any one firm, except in respect of some specific inquiry. Research into statistical methods and the principles of industrial administration and their application should not be overlooked, and finally the circular directs the attention of local education authorities and principals of colleges to the grants available through the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, as well as through professional and other bodies, including the Royal Society, to assist individual research workers in Great Britain. Grants towards assistants and apparatus may enable a member of staff who is engaged on a piece of important fundamental research to acquire help which it would not be reasonable to expect the local education authority to provide.

The Foreign Service and Science

THERE was a debate in the House of Commons on March 20 on the Foreign Service, dealing particularly with recruitment to that Service so as to ensure that it is staffed with those who have a real understanding of the economic and social background of the world to-day and that it reflects adequately the general social structure of Great Britain. Mr. H. McNeil, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, replying for the Government, said that, of the last fifty-eight recruits to the Foreign Service, nineteen had not been at any of the well-known public schools. The Civil Service and Foreign Service are only now feeling the full effect of the Education Act of 1902. The Government fully appreciates, he said, the significance of the new forces arising in the world and the importance of the Foreign Service being competent to handle the issues involved; and it is to bring in young men who are really representative of Britain that labour attachés have already been appointed; more are being sent out, as well as scientific attachés.

Tribophysics Section, Australian Council for Scientific and Industrial Research

THE Lubricants and Bearings Section of the Australian Council for Scientific and Industrial Research has recently been renamed the Tribophysics Section. This research section was established in 1939 to deal with the problems of friction, lubrication,