

NEWS and VIEWS

Physics at St. Bartholomew's Hospital Medical College: Prof. J. Rotblat

DR. J. ROTBLAT, who has recently been appointed to succeed Prof. E. L. Thorpwood in the chair of physics at St. Bartholomew's Hospital Medical College, London, is Polish by birth and was educated in Warsaw, graduating at the Free University of Poland. His first research was on the properties of gases at low pressures, but he soon turned to nuclear physics, working under the direction of Prof. Wertenstein. In 1936 he was awarded the degree of doctor of physics and became assistant director in the Department of Atomic Physics, in the development of which he took an active part. Dr. Rotblat came to Great Britain in the spring of 1939, to work in nuclear physics at Liverpool, where, except for a period of war work in the United States, he has since remained. From the beginning of the War, he took an ever increasing part in the work of the Physics Department at Liverpool, showing outstanding ability in teaching as well as in research. He made valuable contributions to the development of atomic energy in Great Britain, by his own work and by his leadership of a research group. His administrative capacity has been shown in his work as chairman of panels of the Nuclear Physics Committee, one for the promotion of the photographic emulsion technique and the other for the co-ordination of work on new cyclotrons; above all, perhaps, in his work on the Atom Train Exhibition, the success of which was largely due to him. In the past two years Dr. Rotblat's research interest has turned towards the medical applications of physics, more especially the use of radioactive isotopes, a line of work which should find ample scope for development in his new post.

International Council of Scientific Unions

THE report of the Executive Committee of the International Council of Scientific Unions for 1948 (from the General Secretary, at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. Pp. vii + 110. 5s.) forms the usual indispensable reference work on the work of the Unions, listing as it does not only the membership of the Committee, and the adhering Organisations of the Council, but also the reports from the several Unions and Mixed Commissions and new statutes. This year's report gives the modification in the statutes of the International Astronomical Union and the International Union of Pure and Applied Physics, and the new statutes of the International Union of Chemistry and the International Radio-Scientific Union. The report includes under the title of "Science and Peace" an analysis of the seventy replies to the two questions on this subject sent out to representative men of science as a result of the June 1948 meeting of the Commission for Science and its Social Relations (see *Nature*, 162, 237; 1948; and 163, 190; 1949). Among other points of interest in the report is the resolution sent by the Executive Committee to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation and to adhering organisations and for which support from the General Assembly of the Council is being requested. This resolution stresses the importance of the unimpeded passage of scientific workers from one country to another for attending meetings of recognized scientific bodies, for visiting places of research or

instruction or for other forms of international scientific contact. The Executive Committee offers its help in facilitating the work of consulates when in doubt about granting a visa by naming the national adhering body which is best qualified to certify that the applicant is a *bona fide* scientific worker and that his application is for a genuine scientific purpose. A first report from the International Union for the History of the Sciences, formed on October 31, 1947, is included.

Developments at the University of Bratislava

FOUNDED in 1919, the University of Bratislava had no science faculty until 1946, though the natural sciences were taught as part of the medical courses. Recently, much progress has been made, and there are more than two hundred students reading for degrees in science. Among others, the Plant Physiological Institute is well organised and conducts advanced studies, and research work is being undertaken by Dr. L. Pastyrik, who is studying the composition of plant ash in relation to the elements occurring in the soil, thus following the work of Prof. B. Němec. The newly established Wood Research Institute, under the direction of Dr. J. Travník, is a large building, and, though still short of equipment, is conducting investigations especially on the utilization of waste and on the metallic impregnation of beechwood; its library and documentation service are already proving useful. The extensive Slovak forests have hitherto been wastefully exploited, and attention is being directed towards the best means of utilizing timber resources. This Research Institute is staffed mainly from the University but is independent of it.

Bratislava is to have a comprehensive Technical University, now half completed, covering several acres and consisting of laboratories for chemical technology, electricity, pure and applied physics, fermentation and biochemistry, as well as a large engineering department. Among recent investigations conducted at Bratislava are some by Dr. P. Němec on the antibiotic substances occurring in higher fungi. Extracts from several species of *Polyporus*, especially *P. sulphureus*, are strongly antibiotic to certain bacteria, for example, *Bacillus coli*. Not all species of *Polyporus* contain the antibiotic principles, however. An interesting development of the work was the observation of a similar bacteriostatic effect obtained from excreta of herbivorous animals, provided the excreta had been left some days until spores of higher fungi had germinated on them. Dr. Němec has isolated an actinomyces, provisionally denoted M-VII, the antibiotic effect of which is known to be directed against *Staphylococcus pyogenes aureus* (line o) but not against *B. coli* or the Mycobacteria.

Seismology in the Americas

AT the Fourth Pan-American Consultation on Cartography held at Buenos Aires, Argentina, in October 1948 under the auspices of the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History, a resolution was adopted requesting the Institute to create a committee to promote and co-ordinate seismology among American countries. This committee is to establish a central office of information, form a library, maintain a secretariat and scientific staff, and to interchange data with interested world agencies. It is expected that this will give fresh impetus to American seismological activity and international co-operation.