

The Physics Division has recently commenced the examination of the properties of gases of importance to chemical and mechanical engineers. Very accurate experimental work is necessary firmly to establish the theoretical methods used to study these properties, particularly at high pressures and temperatures, and this led to the introduction of a development programme in the field of high-pressure physics. As part of this programme the Laboratory has undertaken to establish standards of measurement for high pressure hitherto unavailable in Britain. Research is in progress to determine the narrow-beam and broad-beam absorption data for high-energy X-rays. A Van de Graaff generator producing X-rays at a potential of 2 MV. is used, and data are being determined for lead, concrete and barium concrete. The Division continues its highly accurate determinations of the heats of combustion of pure organic substances in co-operation with the Chemical Research Laboratory, which is also at Teddington.

OBITUARIES

Sir John Blake

THE death of Sir John L. Blake, Comptroller-General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks, occurred with tragic suddenness on May 18 in Paris, where he was taking part in an International Conference on Copyright, organized by Unesco.

Sir John Blake was born in Watford in January 1898. He was educated at Watford Grammar School and then entered University College, London, as a student of physics and mathematics. During the First World War he served in the Royal Navy and in the Royal Naval Air Service and was present at the raid on Zeebrugge. After demobilization he returned to University College and graduated B.Sc. with first-class honours in 1920. In 1922 he was awarded the degree of M.Sc.

He entered the Patent Office as an assistant examiner in August 1920 and became an examiner in 1925. In 1937 he was awarded a Commonwealth Fund Fellowship which entitled him to undertake a year's study in the United States. He spent most of this time in the United States Patent Office and acquired a considerable knowledge of American patent law and practice which was an asset to him in after years.

During the Second World War he served as a principal in the Ministry of War Transport and was mainly concerned with convoy arrangements and the allocation of merchant ships to ports of discharge in the United Kingdom. He returned to the Patent Office at the beginning of 1944 on being promoted to the rank of superintending examiner. In that year also he was called to the Bar at Gray's Inn. He was appointed to be an assistant comptroller in June 1946 and he became comptroller in February 1949, when Sir Harold Saunders vacated that post on being appointed to the Monopolies and Restrictive Practices Commission.

In 1949 a Bill to amend the Patent and Designs Act, embodying most of the recommendations in the final report of the Swan Committee which had been appointed by the Board of Trade in 1944, was in course of preparation. Sir John Blake's initial task as comptroller was to assist in the drafting of the Bill and in discussing the varied questions which arose during its passage through Parliament. The

Bill was presented in the House of Lords in May 1949 and received the Royal Assent in July. It was followed by two consolidation acts, the Patents Act, 1949, and the Registered Designs Act, 1949, both of which became operative on January 1, 1950.

Soon afterwards Sir John was faced with the task of acquainting himself with another part of the activity of the Patent Office of which he had little or no previous experience, namely, the intricate matter of copyright. He applied himself to this task with characteristic zest and intensity, and within a very short time he became an acknowledged authority on the subject. He was a member of the Copyright Committee appointed by the Board of Trade in 1951 under the chairmanship first of the Marquess of Reading and afterwards of Sir Henry Gregory. The Committee presented its very comprehensive report in July 1952.

He represented Great Britain at a number of international conferences both in Europe and the United States, on patents, copyright and related matters, and earned the admiration and respect of the representatives of other countries by reason of his profound knowledge of the subjects under discussion, his unflinching tact and courtesy and his ability to reconcile the views of others with his own.

He was awarded a knighthood in the New Year Honours in 1952, and later in the same year he received an additional distinction by being elected to a fellowship of University College, London. His death is a sad loss not only to the Patent Office but also to the professional and other bodies outside the Office with whom his work brought him into contact.

J. N. BROWN

Prof. Paul Selényi

DR. PAUL SELÉNYI, a well-known Hungarian experimental physicist, died suddenly at the age of sixty-eight at Budapest on March 21, after a year of protracted ill-health. He was a pupil of Lorand Eötvös in Budapest and was devoted to his memory throughout his life; he completed a biography of Eötvös shortly before his death.

Selényi's most fundamental contribution to physics dates back before the First World War. By an ingenious method, using a fluorescent coating on a total reflecting prism, he demonstrated the coherence of light rays emitted in nearly opposite directions from this fluorescent light source. His experiment evoked immediate appreciation and remains one of the fundamental experiments of wave optics.

The first anti-Semitic wave in Hungary in the early 'twenties cut across his scientific career. He was forced into second-rate industrial work; he suffered financial hardship and lost his first wife. However, he soon joined the leading industrial research laboratory of the country, then newly founded, that of the Tungram electric lamp factory, under the leadership of the late Prof. I. Pfeifer. Here he had ample opportunity to show his extraordinary skill in experimental physics. There was scarcely a problem of vacuum technique, lamp technology or photometry he did not help to solve. He always preferred simple experimental arrangements to elaborate apparatus, and he never gave up scientific research. Photocells and barrier-layer cells were among his favourite apparatus. For many years before and during the Second World War he worked on an invention of his, named electrography, which could have served as a basis for picture transmission