

NEWS AND VIEWS

Successful Physics

THE Institute of Physics and the Physical Society seems to have had a successful and busy year. In its annual report for 1965, the Institute says that membership increased by 1,086 to a total of 11,273 at the end of the year. This is a larger increase than in recent years, and is attributed in part to the energy which has been devoted to recruitment and in part to the introduction of the new licentiate grade of membership. The buoyant membership has been reflected in a buoyant revenue, and the Society was able to transfer more than £9,000 to its general reserve during 1965. It is proving to be particularly successful as a publishing organization and showed a surplus of some £50,000 on the sales of books and journals during 1965—a figure that should comfortably cover the cost of salaries and other overheads. Even the annual exhibition of instruments produced a cheerful surplus of more than £5,000, though in this respect 1965 was not so successful as 1964.

These surpluses are evidently not going to be wasted. During 1965, the Institute of Physics and the Physical Society finally acquired the Fulmer Research Institute and thus set up in business as a research contractor in its own right. It also provided its members with advice on what are described as "various aspects of professional conduct". Though the four documents concerned are supposed to be confidential to the membership, enquiry shows that they are concerned with the terms of employment which working physicists should be prepared to accept, the terms and conditions on which outside consultancy work should be carried out, the rules to be followed by physicists wishing to write for the Press or to appear on television, and the precautions to be taken by those about to sign contracts with publishers. Clearly, the Institute of Physics and the Physical Society now feels able to pass on to its membership some of the secrets of its own success in combining business with learning. It remains curiously anomalous that this go-ahead organization still cannot settle for one half or the other of its composite title, and cannot call itself either the Institute of Physics or the Physical Society.

World Atmospheric Study

THE meteorologists have tentatively settled on 1972 for a comprehensive study of weather patterns and their predictability in both hemispheres to be known as the Global Atmospheric Research Programme. The decision was taken at the second meeting of the Committee on Atmospheric Sciences of the International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics (IUGG) held in Geneva at the end of April. According to Prof. P. A. Sheppard of the Imperial College of Science and Technology, a member of the IUGG Committee, the aim is nothing less than an observation of the whole atmosphere up to 30 km in order to determine how far ahead—perhaps a few weeks—the evolution of weather systems can be worked out from data available at a given instant. "We see the possibility and we should try to turn it into fact."

Talk of the research programme has been in the air for the past two years. Part of the stimulus for it has

been a wish to see whether the atmosphere is really determinate on larger time scales as some theories of numerical prediction now suggest. Weather satellites provide further opportunities. Because of the planning which has to be done, 1972 is the earliest year in which the experiment can be mounted. It is intended that intensive studies in that year will be well co-ordinated with the World Weather Watch being sponsored by the World Meteorological Organization. The atmospheric programme is, however, intended to be very much more complete and, indeed, it owes its existence in part to the impatience of some meteorologists with the difficulty of using the work of the World Weather Watch to make a critical assessment of the value of their theories in computer programmes.

It is probable that by 1972 there will be in operation a number of meteorological balloons, able to drift at fixed heights of up to 30 km, and equipped to transmit information by means of communications satellites. According to one plan, these balloons would be launched into eight or nine distinct levels in the atmosphere; they would be sufficiently permanent, and their spacing sufficiently close, to provide the detailed information about the free atmosphere on which accurate long-range computer forecasting must eventually be based.

Atomic Energy in Latin America

THE Organization of American States appears to be doing some constructive work at last. The Inter-American Nuclear Energy Commission of the Organization met for its sixth annual meeting in Washington, D.C., at the end of June. Five resolutions were passed encouraging research and co-operation in the economic uses of atomic power, but the Organization has not yet chosen to back these resolutions with hard cash. Before the June meeting, the approved programme for 1966–1967 provided only for the holding of a conference on radiochemistry and a special legal committee meeting. At the meeting itself, four countries pledged 35,000 dollars, including 20,000 from the United States, and other member states stated their intention to make contributions during the year. The additional funds will be used for technical conferences on radioisotopes in agriculture and food preservation, reactors for the production of electric power and water, and problems related to health and radiological protection. Some funds will also be available for assisting member states in the fields of insect control, the assessment of water resources, food preservation and the determination of soil needs. Additional funds would make it possible to expand these programmes, to implement study groups to deal with specific topics, and to initiate training programmes in accordance with interests expressed by the member states.

The meeting agreed that "the importance of these programmes may not have been adequately recognized at all stages of the budgetary process of the Organization of American States" and resolved "to recommend that the Secretary-General of the Organization give greater consideration to the growing importance of science and technology in the balanced development of the countries of the hemisphere, and particularly to more adequate support of reasonable programmes in the field of nuclear energy". The 1967–1968 budget that the meeting submitted for approval includes