

News and Views

Traffic Noise and the Ministry of Transport

THERE is evidence that Great Britain is becoming noise conscious; and we have had occasion during the last few years to refer to the subject of noise measurement and noise control as conducted at the National Physical Laboratory and elsewhere. Certain directions in which traffic noise might well receive the attention of the Government were put before the Anti-Noise League at its recent meeting at Oxford (see NATURE of July 28, p. 149). As from August 27, the Minister of Transport has now decreed a zone of silence for the London area, the hooting of horns being entirely prohibited at night (between 11.30 p.m. and 7 a.m.) within a radius of five miles from King Charles's statue at Charing Cross. London Transport is also instructing its tram drivers not to use gongs in the prescribed area. To judge by the experience of Paris, Brussels and Rome, where no increase in road accidents is reported as the result of similar measures, the experiment is likely to be wholly successful, and relief from, at any rate, one type of noise will be experienced by the area in question. It is understood that similar zones of silence will be set up in other parts of the country.

THE Minister has also set up a new Committee to deal with traffic noises in general, the terms of reference being "to consider and report upon the principal causes of noise in the operation of mechanically-propelled vehicles and the steps which can efficiently be taken to limit the noise so arising". The members of the Committee are: Sir Henry Fowler (chairman), formerly chief mechanical engineer of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway; Mr. Leslie Walton, deputy president of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders; Mr. H. R. Watling, director of the British Cycle and Motor-Cycle Manufacturers' and Traders' Union; Dr. H. J. Gough, superintendent of the Engineering Department, National Physical Laboratory; Dr. G. W. C. Kaye, superintendent of the Physics Department, National Physical Laboratory; Mr. E. S. Perrin, Ministry of Transport; Mr. A. E. N. Taylor (secretary), Ministry of Transport. It is believed that the exhaust silencing of sports cars and motor-cycles, the chief noise offenders on the road to-day, will receive special attention. The Government will place at the disposal of the Committee the full resources of the National Physical Laboratory, where new acoustic laboratories (described in NATURE of August 11, p. 202) were recently completed. Work on the exhaust silencing of motor-vehicles has also been carried out at University College, Southampton. Such questions as the setting up of standards of noise as the basis of legal control, if that should be considered desirable, will clearly have to rest on scientific investigation, but it is evident from the composition of the Committee that the Minister seeks the co-operation of the industry in giving practical and equitable effect to the findings of the Committee in its efforts to secure quieter road transport.

Science and War

THE issue for August of the *Labour Monthly* includes replies to a questionnaire addressed to various people, labour leaders, sympathetic professors and others, on the subject of war. The purpose, of registering strong labour opposition against war, is of course an excellent one, but this presentation of it is unfortunately marred by the intemperance of the language and the obvious intention of linking up any war that might occur, with the continuance of what the editors describe as the "present capitalist and imperialist system". No evidence is offered of the assumed connexion between the two, and any worker who at the call of his country would again consent to fight, is dismissed as a slave of imperialism. The whole great subject of war, especially in relation to science and the future of society, is of intense interest, but one must regret the use of it as a stick to beat our own suffering society, and that of other countries, especially France and the United States, which are obviously intensely and nationally pacifist. No fair-minded person can imagine that our Government or any other Government which we are at all likely to have, would wish for war or do otherwise than make every possible effort to avoid it. Governments may very possibly make mistakes, or miss chances of doing something which might promote a better general spirit. For this they should be watched and criticised, but if, for purposes of another propaganda, we assume that they are dishonest or subservient to unworthy interests, the unfairness of the charge tends to create another division among the naturally pacific forces of the country.

By such means we run a risk of strengthening the very influences which we are most anxious to suppress. Thus the League of Nations is obviously a force for peace. It is not at the moment so strong as the friends of peace would desire, and has certainly missed some important opportunities in recent years. But when Mr. C. H. Norman (quoted in this pamphlet) says, "I noticed that over fifty of them [delegates to a League of Nations Conference] had committed crimes varying from murder, blackmail, sodomy, offences against children, down to all the swindling and fraud that is the second suit of most European and American politicians", the candid reader will shake his head in despair. Indiscriminate mud-slinging can have no result but an occasional murder. The analysis of the social forces at work on such occasions as the outbreak of a great war is as puerile as the tone is spiteful. The same remark would apply to the judgment of Mr. Ernest Henri, also given in the pamphlet, that "the Nazi movement has failed in Germany". That it has great elements of weakness, and that it might end in a grave social upheaval, may well be sustained, but that it "has failed" is so foolish a judgment that it can only spring from a mind determined to see nothing but what it wants to see. Unfortunately, this is the