

## NEWS AND VIEWS

## Element 85

It is announced that Dr. W. Minder, of the University of Berne, has succeeded in isolating element 85. This, it is claimed, has been produced in small quantities from the decomposition of actinium, which is radioactive. Dr. Minder has named the new element 'helvetium' in honour of his country. It is hoped that further details of this claim will be available shortly. Commenting on this announcement in the *Evening News* (London) of August 13 is of such encouraging significance as to be worth placing on record. This newspaper says: "It is odd to learn to-day, in the midst of war, that a patient Swiss scientist has succeeded at last in isolating the elusive chemical element '85'. It is still odder to reflect that in the long view of history a discovery of that sort may rank above all the perils and victories of these days."

## The Purchase Tax and Literature

It was announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the House of Commons on August 13 that newspapers, books and periodicals are to be exempt from the proposed purchase tax. He stated that he feels it would not be in the public interest at this time of war that there should be any decrease in the circulation of newspapers or any diminution of the services they provide for the public. This announcement will undoubtedly give satisfaction to all scientific workers. There is no doubt, however, as pointed out in the leading article entitled "Books in Wartime" in *NATURE* of May 11, p. 719, that this welcome decision is of much greater significance than would seem superficially. Sir Kingsley Wood added that books are to be exempt from the tax "at least for the present". It is to be hoped that, for the important reasons set out in the above-mentioned article, the future will not bring any significant change in this new policy.

## The New World Order

In his Cawthron lecture, 1939, "Some Problems of the New World Order" (Nelson, New Zealand: Cawthron Institute, 1939), Dr. G. H. Scholefield, pointing out that the raw material of political science is man in his organization for life, the family, the community and the nation, where the reactions of mankind are not so well known and precise as in biology or chemistry, gives a brief review of the sources of our liberty, the post-War revolutions and the rise of the dictatorships. Tracing the growth of German aggression, he emphasizes that with the destruction of dictatorship, the problem of settling Germany in a peaceful and prosperous state will remain and will involve some sacrifice. The great danger in such a war as this is that it may end before our leaders have fully studied how best to make peace and how to arrange inter-

national relations in future. This will involve attention to economic matters and the solution of problems of social organization.

Science and invention should alleviate man's labour, enable him to maintain himself by working shorter hours and to devote a greater proportion of his time to rest, to pleasure and to cultivating the arts. Failure of the social sciences to keep pace with the applied sciences has led to the position that the human race can produce all that is required for its material well-being with quite a light amount of personal labour while we have not devised means for all potential consumers to obtain possession legally of what they require. Neither Germany nor the democracies have solved the problem of absorbing unemployment and bringing mechanization under social control. Finally, Dr. Scholefield briefly touches on the possibilities of an international federation of States.

## India's Future and the Constitution

ONCE again the British Government, notwithstanding the preoccupations of war, has turned aside to direct its attention to furthering the interests and promoting the welfare of a people for whom it accepts imperial responsibility. The statement of policy made by Lord Linlithgow, Viceroy of India, on August 9 and by Mr. L. S. Amery, Secretary of State for India, on the same day in the House of Commons was framed with the object of enabling the people of India to fulfil their anxious desire to contribute fully to the common cause in the present world struggle, and to ensure the triumph of our common ideals. In brief, the British Government proposes in the interests of Indian national unity, and notwithstanding the differences between parties which previous discussion has shown to be still unbridged, that the Viceroy's Council should now be expanded to include representatives of the political parties, and further that a consultative committee should be established which, as a war advisory council, will meet at regular intervals and will include representatives of the Indian States and of other interests in the national life of India as a whole. The statement of policy goes on to say that while it is clear that the present moment when the Commonwealth is engaged in a struggle for existence is not one in which fundamental constitutional issues can be decisively resolved, yet the British Government is prepared to undertake to set up at the close of the war a body representative of the principal elements of India's national life in order to devise the framework of a new constitution.

The state of tension between the various elements of the political situation in India at the present time is too well known to need stress. It has led to a deadlock, and lays it open to doubt whether the democratic idea has obtained a more than superficial acceptance in the minds of powerful sections of the

Indian population. The British Government is not blind to this aspect of the situation. While making it clear that Dominion status is its objective, it has laid it down without ambiguity in this statement of policy that the British Government cannot be a party to the coercion of any elements of India's national life into obedience to a system of government whose authority those elements do not accept. Secondly, it is declared categorically and insistently that the framework of the scheme for the future government of India should be primarily the responsibility of Indians themselves, and should originate from Indian conceptions of the social, economic, and political structure of Indian life. Subject to responsibilities from which His Majesty's Government cannot divest itself, it desires to see Indian conceptions given the fullest expression. This statement of policy made on behalf of His Majesty's Government is a bold and timely step forward to promote national unity among the Indian peoples. Its success or failure depends upon the people themselves. For while it embodies those principles of social justice which would submit the form of government to the determination of the peoples themselves, its translations into practical effect is clearly made to depend upon the display of that spirit of toleration, the exercise of that mutual co-operation, and that freedom from coercion which is the essence of the democratic ideal.

#### Colour-Blindness and Camouflage

THE chief characteristic which distinguishes colour-blind people from those with normal vision, is a reduced ability to distinguish colours that are normally quite distinct. Superficially, therefore, it would seem highly improbable that colour-blind persons could detect a camouflaged building that an ordinary observer would miss. This suggestion, however, which has come from the United States recently, is not wholly without foundation, as there are at least three ways in which certain colour-blind observers might see more than the ordinary person. For example, in a building camouflaged with large irregular patches of colour, the actual outline of the building may be lost in the jumble of these patterns. But the colour-blind person may be scarcely conscious of the variegated colours, so that to him the outline of the building may be almost unaffected by the camouflage. In the Ishihara test for colour-blindness, certain of the cards actually use this principle; a faint blue figure is printed on a background of highly coloured dots of various hues. To the normal observer the blue figure is lost against the background, but the colour-blind person may spot it. Again, in the protanopic and protanomalous type of defect, reds and yellows appear darker than usual, and with certain colouring of building and background this could lead to an enhanced contrast and so give the colour-blind person his advantage.

That a third very hypothetical case is possible, is shown by the fact that, using a colorimeter, it is possible for a normal observer to make a colour match between two halves of a field that would not

be a match for a defective observer of the anomalous trichromat type. It could therefore be argued that it might happen that a building matched its background for the normal person, yet, for the anomalous trichromat, the two would be distinct. But for every instance of this kind that might be suggested, there are innumerable examples in which the colour-blind observer is at a marked disadvantage, and in other ways would of course be a source of real danger. Moreover, if the normal person were provided with pieces of coloured glass, it would be most unlikely that the colour-blind person would ever be able to score off him.

#### University of London

THE report of the Principal on the Work of the University of London, 1939-40, gives a short account of the officially recommended dispersal of the various schools. The result was a heavy demand on those who received the evacuees, the Universities of Cambridge, Bristol and Wales in particular. The intensive air-raids which were expected not having yet arrived, Birkbeck College has re-opened for day and evening classes. The Imperial College of Science and Technology has remained open at South Kensington for several courses in chemistry, physics, and mining, and the London School of Economics with day teaching at Peterhouse has maintained evening classes in London. Bedford College went to Newnham, and Westfield to St. Peter's Hall, Oxford. The agricultural students at Wye went to Reading for the first term, but the College was re-opened for teaching last January. The British Postgraduate Medical School and the Lister Institute remained in London, and nearly all the other medical schools are now there again, and would plainly lose by dissociation from their special hospitals. The Government decision not to call up under the age of twenty led to some trouble in unexpected accommodation. At the end of August the Ministry of Information took over the Senate House, and the new wing designed for the Institute of Historical Research, when finished, will also be occupied by the Ministry. The University was due to receive a grant of £25,000 from the National Fitness Council towards the new Students' Union, but that was vetoed by the Treasury on the outbreak of War. Lord Nuffield gave twice as much, and on being asked if in the altered circumstances he would withdraw the gift, wished it to be retained for building in happier times.

It is good to learn that the work of the University goes on satisfactorily. Examinations have been held in eleven provincial centres, and there has been no lowering of standards. The University has had to provide for a large number of external students, and the Extension Department has made up for the falling off of its normal work by attending to the education of British and Canadian soldiers. The War will reduce the supply of students, though the numbers at present keep up rather well, so that the question of adequate financing will become urgent. The decision not to reduce the Government grant is important. That of the L.C.C. for this year is much