

NEWS and VIEWS

Science and Research in Great Britain

THE debate which took place in the House of Commons on April 19 on Sir Granville Gibson's motion urging "the declaration of a bold and generous Government policy of financial assistance directed to the expansion of teaching and research facilities in our universities and technical colleges, to the extension of pure and applied research in all fields by the State, by industry through private firms and research associations and to the effective and rapid application of the results of research", in connexion with which the White Paper on Scientific Research and Development (Cmd. 6514) had been issued, covered much of the ground of recent reports of the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee and other bodies, as well as the recent lectures on science and industry arranged by the Manchester Chamber of Commerce. Sir Granville said that in regard to the research associations the Government grant has not increased in proportion with the increase in contributions from industry. An increase in expenditure on research of anything up to £15,000,000 would be a valuable investment for the country's future. Like Mr. Edmund Harvey and others who followed, Sir Granville pointed out that the staffs of the research and scientific departments of the colleges of Great Britain are far too small, and Mr. Salt, who followed him, urged that the number of research workers should be doubled. On particular fields of research, Mr. Salt instanced coal research as specially important; Sir Ernest Shepperson stressed the need for agricultural research, particularly in relation to nutrition, and was supported by Mr. R. C. Morrison, Dr. Haden Guest and Major York, as well as by Mr. Snadden, who referred especially to veterinary research; Sir John Graham Kerr referred to fisheries research, while Mr. Owen Evans and Mr. James Griffiths directed attention to the neglect of geological research and surveys. Sir George Schuster said that more attention should be given to our failure to make full use of the knowledge gained from the limited research carried out, and urged that, first, a more scientific frame of mind must be created in British industry; secondly, closer contact should be established between those engaged in pure scientific research and those concerned with its practical applications; and thirdly, means should be found to assist the development stage and the practical evolution of new industrial ideas.

The Lord President of the Council, Mr. Attlee, replying on the debate, said that the amendment was in full accord with the policy which the Government is following now and which it desires should be followed in the post-war period. The Government is fully alive to the fact that the winning of the peace will depend largely on a full and right use of scientific men and organizations. Assistance will be given in a bold policy, and the Government will take a lead, but it must be backed by a readiness to use the results of that research and by public opinion. The nation must become more aware of the importance of science. We shall be utilizing scientific methods throughout our activities of Government and of industry, and industry must be ready to take advantage of the new openings which the application of scientific research affords. The Government is also examining the need for the establishment of a fund to meet the cost of developing new inventions and of

providing facilities for testing new ideas for industry, as well as how best to fit this in with the work of the co-operative research associations. The Government is also entirely in favour of generous support for the extension of teaching and research in the universities of Britain, but Mr. Attlee questioned the practicability of any statutory university advisory council. Mr. Attlee, welcoming references in the debate to the remuneration of scientific workers, said that the whole question of the relative remuneration of scientific workers in Government service is under investigation and steps have already been taken to raise the remuneration of the heads of research institutions. He thought a Ministry of Science would be a great mistake: what we need is to see that there are persons in all departments who are trained in the scientific method and appreciate what it means. Finally, he referred to the considerable improvement in the machinery of government through the creation of a Central Statistical Section and a Central Economic Section. He welcomed the debate as promoting the formation of an informed public opinion which would support a sustained effort.

Control of German Chemical Industry

IN the House of Lords on April 18, Lord Vansittart raised the question of the control of German chemical industry after the War. In particular, he asked for the appointment of a committee of scientific men to prepare a suitable scheme for the control or elimination of Germany's nitrate and hydrogenation plants. Such control might involve a close watch on German scientific education and research, and even the limitation of manufacture of certain high-precision instruments. There will be general agreement with his view that scientific men are best able to devise means to achieve such restriction and control. Lord Vansittart was supported by Lord Horder, who mentioned two synthetic drugs, used in the treating of sleeping sickness and malaria respectively, the supply of which had been deliberately restricted in countries outside Germany as a part of the Nazi preparation for total warfare. Lord Strabolgi and Lord Farringdon sounded a note of caution, pointing out that to cut down German nitrate production unduly would have a harmful effect on European agriculture and would in the end impede the work of re-establishing the health of the people.

The Government reply was given by Lord Cherwell, Paymaster-General. He said that various committees have been considering the questions involved, and the Government intends not only to call in more expert advice but also to give great attention to the recommendations made. He agreed that to prevent Germany from manufacturing nitrate and ammonia would create difficulty in supplying Central Europe with fertilizers, but German research will have to be supervised. The question of the control of German chemical industry is part of the much larger question of curbing the German war potential, and the Government is prepared to take every step possible to achieve this end.

It is indeed welcome news that the Government has this matter under consideration, and that scientific workers, whose special competence in this field is obvious, are to take a prominent part in formulating policy. It will be recalled that the matter was raised by Sir Robert Robinson so long ago as early in 1943, at the annual luncheon of the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee, and some of the problems involved have been discussed in these columns (see