

student numbers, and what effects such an expansion would have on the quality of research. On pollution, Dr Dainton said that the CSP has invited the research councils to look at the scientific side of the question, but, because it is purely an advisory body, it cannot concern itself with legislation.

Dr J. C. Kendrew, who has just taken over the vice-chairmanship of the CSP, will be especially concerned with international cooperation and exchange. He indicated that the CSP is looking at the possibility of setting up international groups in existing laboratories, and is attempting to promote scientific exchange between European countries.

MICROORGANISMS

Cultures at Cambridge

by our Botany Correspondent

TEACHERS, pharmacologists and other biologists who use the collection of algae and protozoa at the Botany School in Cambridge can expect an even better service in the future. The Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) has just spent £106,000 on new buildings to house the collection, which it has taken under its wing as a culture centre of algae and protozoa. The NERC grant will allow both the staff and the collection to be expanded and has also provided an electron microscope which will aid the process of identifying protozoa.

The collection, now composed of about 1,500 different strains, is based on a few hundred cultures originally brought to England by Professor E. G. Pringsheim, who left the German University in Prague just before the 1938 invasion of Czechoslovakia. The director of the new centre, Mr E. A. George, began as Pringsheim's assistant in 1947, and has been the curator of the culture collection since 1952. He expects the size of the collection to more than double in the next few years in response to increasing demand.

About 6,000 cultures are dispatched every year from Cambridge for various purposes. Many customers are teachers who need material for their classes. One culture, which costs 10s within Britain and £1 if sent abroad, provides enough material for twenty-five students. Industry provides many customers too, for algae and protozoa make a convenient system for testing the effects of untried compounds on living organisms. Before proceeding to rats or human subjects, useful information can be gained from the responses of these microorganisms to potential drugs. Two algae in particular, *Oxomonas* and *Euglena gracilis*, are much used for estimating vitamins, which have a measurable effect on their rate of growth. The food industry and hospitals make frequent use of this method. The culture collection can also save microbiologists a great deal of trouble by supplying particular strains of known uniformity and purity.

Mr George hopes that in their new home the scientific officers on his staff will be able to devote half their time to research, apart from the work they have to do on the collection, which involves isolating new strains, developing new culture media and so on. The initial lines of research will include the study of marine flagellates by electron microscopy and the development of methods for preserving living cultures by freezing or drying.

Parliament in Britain

Lung Cancer

MR GERALD FOWLER, Minister of State, Department of Education and Science, said that the Medical Research Council's Air Pollution Unit is investigating the possibility of a link between lung cancer and air pollution. But no evidence has yet been found of any connexion between lung cancer and atmospheric sulphur dioxide. (Written answers, February 9.)

Fluoridation

EIGHTY-ONE local health authorities in England are opposed to fluoridation of water supplies, and ninety-eight are in favour. Dr John Dunwoody, Joint Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Security, who gave these figures, also said that the Health Education Council expects to spend about £16,000 in 1969-70 on education about fluoridation, and a similar sum in 1970-71. Dr Dunwoody did not comment, however, on the suggestion from Mr Frank Judd that the government should introduce new legislation on fluoridation, and that it should remove the present discretion given to local authorities. (Written answers, February 9.)

Scowen Committee

DR MICHAEL WINSTANLEY asked the Secretary of State for the Social Services whether he will make changes in the personnel of the Committee on the Safety of Drugs, to restore the medical profession's confidence in the committee following its announcements about adverse reactions to oral contraceptives. But Mr Richard Crossman could see no justification for changes. (Written answers, February 9.)

Radiological Protection

THE radiological protection bill received a second reading in the House of Commons. The bill, which seeks to transfer to a single statutory board the present functions of the Radioactive Substances Advisory Committee, the Radiological Protection Service (run by the Medical Research Council) and the health and safety branch of the UKAEA, received little opposition. The proposed National Radiological Board will undertake research and provide advice and services in connexion with radiation hazards. The estimated gross expenditure on these services for 1969-70 is £822,000, of which 45 per cent will be paid by the Department of Health and Social Services, 30 per cent by the Atomic Energy Authority, 20 per cent by the Medical Research Council, and the remaining 5 per cent will come from the Scottish Office. (Debate, February 10.)

Aircraft Smoke Pollution

SUITABLE locations for measuring the smoke pollution caused by aircraft flying on the glide path into London Airport have been established, and measurement tests should start within six to eight weeks. This assurance was given by Mr Goronwy Roberts, Minister of State, Board of Trade, in reply to a question from Mr Anthony Royle. (Written answers, February 11.)

L Dopa

THE Committee on the Safety of Drugs has cleared two more preparations of L-dopa for clinical trials. But Dr John Dunwoody, who gave this information, said that it is too early to estimate the likely cost of the drugs. (Written answers, February 9.)