

NEWS and VIEWS

Study of Public Administration

IN his inaugural lecture from the new chair of public administration at the London School of Economics and Political Science on February 3, 1948, Dr. W. A. Robson welcomed the creation of the chair as a sign of the extended recognition now accorded to the study of public administration by the University of London (London: Stevens and Sons, Ltd. Pp. v+26. 2s. 6d.). It is impossible, however, for this vast field to be covered adequately in regard either to teaching or research, he said, unless far greater provision is made for senior posts at academic institutions throughout Britain. The expansion in the scale and scope of public administration is a dominant feature of our times and is to be seen not only in the growth and multiplication of government institutions and of the public corporations, but also in the new conception of the task of government. The keynote of most of the recent developments has been extreme centralization, and Dr. Robson expressed the view that contemporary trends are not in conformity with the best democratic principles and that we are not making the most efficient use of our resources of political energy, administrative ability and experience. In particular, he criticized the failure to appreciate the need for a democratic form of regional government, and supported the view advanced since in the second report of the Local Government Boundary Commission that the Commission should be given wider powers. Public ownership and the nationalization of industry both call for much greater efforts to measure the results of public administration in relation to its cost in terms of money and effort, and he believes that the question of centralization and decentralization needs discussion in the universities before a coherent body of principle is likely to be evolved for practical use.

At the Cabinet-level also, there are changes which call for further study and discussion, and such problems as questions of personnel administration, the distribution of powers, methods of control, organic relationships and constitutional development require re-examination, quite apart from the new problems presented by nationalized industries and the relations between public corporations and Parliament. He urged that the Economic Survey should be accompanied by a corresponding survey of public administration at intervals of not less than a year. Overshadowing all is the problem of how to ensure that the vast powers which are needed by the executive are conferred and exercised in conformity with the political traditions and the liberal spirit of the British people. He urged that we should cease to think of freedom only in terms of the absence of restraint and consider it also in terms of opportunity. He suggested that Parliament should take pains to define more carefully the executive powers which it confers; to state more clearly the purposes for which they are to be used; and to see not only that the rights of the public and the duties of public authorities are reciprocal, but also that the obligations of the citizen and the executive are mutual. Finally, he pleaded that the universities of Britain have a special contribution to make to the discussion of such problems, by diffusing a knowledge of the principles underlying a sound system of democratic government among the wide range of students, by helping the community to become more discriminating in its attitude to govern-

ment, more critical of defects and more appreciative of achievements in the public service, and by investigating the working of institutions and analysing policies and processes. The more closely the different branches of social science can co-operate in a combined attack on the complex problems confronting us, the more effective the result is likely to be.

Annular Eclipse of May 8-9

BAD weather conditions went far to spoil the project of the National Geographic Society to link up the triangulations of Asia and of the United States and Canada by exact timing of contacts at the recent eclipse (*Nature*, March 13, p. 389). Only two expeditions—those to Rebun Jima, a little fisher-folk island off the north-western tip of Japan and to Bangkok in Siam—were favoured by clear enough conditions to get satisfactory results. Dr. C. H. Smiley, head of the last-named party, reported thin cirrus clouds, while Dr. John A. O'Keefe of the other party had ideal conditions due to a last-moment clearing. These two observations may link up the Indian geodetic triangulation with those of Japan and possibly Korea. A link-up with the American triangulation may also be possible owing to the successful photographs secured from two B29 Superfortress planes working from an air base on Shemya Island in the Aleutians. Short-range navigation methods were used, radar signals being sent out from the aeroplanes and received by ground stations the exact locations of which were known. Obviously fresh problems are involved in the use of data from moving aeroplanes, and it will be interesting to see the final reports when the material obtained has been examined. It is to be hoped that Great Britain, from which the suggestion first originated that eclipse observations might be used for geodetic studies, may before long take a part in securing some valuable results along these lines.

Hylean Amazon Institute

A NINE-NATION Conference for the creation of an International Institute of the Hylean Amazon, called jointly by the Governments of Peru and Brazil and by Unesco, has successfully concluded its deliberation at Iquitos, Peru. A convention establishing the Institute was agreed upon and will come into force upon final acceptance by the founding nations. The following nations signed the final act of the Conference: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, France, Holland, Italy, Peru and Venezuela. The scientific programme for the Institute was formulated, and a budget of approximately 300,000 dollars was set for the first year of the Institute's operation. A financial protocol was also signed by Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, France, Holland, Peru and Venezuela, which determined the scale of national contributions toward financing the Institute. The United States and the United Kingdom expressed great interest in the Institute, and will study ways of actively participating in its work.

Pending the initiation of the operation of the Institute, an Interim Commission was established and the first meeting of the Commission opened in Manaus, Brazil, on May 13. In accordance with instructions from the Unesco General Conference held in Mexico last year, the Director-General has obtained the services of outstanding world experts to carry out surveys in anthropology, biology and soil science to guide the investigators of the Institute during its first years of operation in the Hylean