

TWO VIEWS OF TRIESTE

The following comments are from interviews which took place at the seminar held in Trieste in June.

PROF. N.N. KHURI, OF LEBANON

The whole vitality of both the technological and scientific life of a country depends not only on how well its universities are training engineers and technical people, but on how alive their pure science departments are. It is always easy for someone in a Government to see the direct importance of some project which has to do with the improvement of agriculture in lands which have very little water. So the pressure is always there to put all the funds and effort into this kind of research and this kind of teaching. It is hard for people faced with day-to-day problems to make a decision that is really not going to affect things today or tomorrow but will certainly determine how things will look, technologically and scientifically, in fifteen or twenty years. An advantage of theoretical physics is that people need no equipment and can do their work anywhere. As a first step by the Agency this is the most logical, the most needed step that can be taken. If one forgets the proper foundation of things, then one is just fixing things up and not really building a viable scientific community – say, in a country like the United Arab Republic – which will be able to regenerate itself and keep on growing, and even in the long run contribute significantly like others of its size in Europe and elsewhere.

PROF. R.G. SACHS, ARGONNE, USA

I think that we see here the essence of physics, which is very important to our world culture. There is no direct practical application in sight at present; people here are not concerned with practical applications, but with the essence, the truths, and I think this is the epitome of our world culture. It is wonderful to be able to get people from all over the world who are interested in these things to come together to talk to each other freely about them. Since it is non-controversial we can talk quite freely and we can learn to understand each other a great deal better without getting into any difficulties at all. In the overall picture the relationship between people from different countries is exactly the same as it is between people within the same country. Of course, to ask what good it is, puts us in a difficult position. You can ask what good is art, and in a practical sense it may be of no immediate value, but it contributes something to the souls of men. I feel about theoretical physics that it is in about the same creative category as art. It does require a great deal more formal education, but it is a form of self-expression – a source from which one can renew oneself and renew the culture, and I think it is quite important to participate in it. Furthermore, a small country with limited resources can make an enormous contribution to theoretical physics – as Denmark and Holland have done.