NEWS IN BRIEF

• **SOVIET PHYSICIST TO TOUR U.S.:** In October a well-known Soviet physicist, Pyotr Kapitsa, is expected to tour a half dozen American universities and also visit the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) in Washington. Kapitsa, who heads the Institute of Physics in Moscow and aided in the development of Sputnik I, will be visiting the United States for the first time following a visit to Canada where he will lecture at the University of Alberta. In the U.S. he is expected to visit Harvard, Cornell, Stanford, Caltech, Rockefeller University, and the Bell Telephone Laboratories in Washington, as well as the National Academy of Sciences. The 75-year-old physicist, well known for his work in magnetism and low-energy physics, will lecture on a number of topics, including the education of scientists in the Soviet Union. Kapitsa, who has been allowed to attend many international scientific meetings, is regarded in the Soviet Union as an outspoken scientist who is openly critical of some Soviet policies, but loyal to Communist ideas in his public statements and writings. His travel plans have been confirmed by the Soviet government, and an NAS official told *Science* it was likely that the Soviet scientist would be able to come to the U.S. During the 1920's, Kapitsa worked at the Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge, England, and is widely recognized for work in magnetic research.

• **STUDENT LOAN BILL HELD UP:** Among items of unfinished business awaiting Congress when it returns from its summer recess after Labor Day is an emergency bill aimed at increasing availability of bank loans to college students who are now finding it hard to obtain loans for college because of high interest rates. On 12 August the Senate acted to pass a measure that would have allowed the federal government to pay lenders "incentive allowances" in addition to the interest of up to 7 percent guaranteed under the 1965 higher education act. The House failed to act before the recess, despite prodding from the Administration, which had hoped that the measure would clear Congress in time to help students obtain loans before the opening of the new academic year. Educators estimate that failure to pass the bill may prevent 150,000 to 200,000 students from getting loans.

senting Upjohn, and Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering, representing the PMA. But there was also in the Panalba case the intervention, on the company side, of Robert H. Finch, Secretary of HEW, which was triggered by Representative Garry E. Brown (R–Mich.), of Kalamazoo, and—odd as it may seem, and up to a certain point in time—of the FDA itself.

In defending Panalba the Upjohn Company has ignored invitations to testify before the interested congressional subcommittees. It preferred a day in court, where lawyer Stanley L. Temko of Covington & Burling warned that a halt in the sale of Panalba would inflict "irreparable injury" on Upjohn. The drug accounts for 12 percent of the firm's domestic gross income.

The PMA had a broader concern: If the sale of Panalba could be halted without the years of delay that might accompany a grant of a hearing, the FDA would have a clear legal track to stop the sale of the pen-streps and the pen-sulfas. In addition, there would be ominous implications for other drugs that, even if not shown to be actually hazardous, had never been shown to be effective—but that nonetheless produce hundreds of millions of dollars a year for the companies that manufacture them.

For many physicians—Upjohn says that 23,000 regularly prescribe Panalba—the stakes were of a different order, having to do with the claim to an unrestricted "right" to prescribe, even if that "right" is founded on advertising, promotion, and other forms of nonscience. Panalba, Temko told Judge Kent, is one of the medicines most often prescribed, and since it entered the market in 1957, he said, 750 million doses have been administered. Indeed, fixed-ratio combinations of one kind or another—including Panalba and the pen-streps and the pen-sulfas—account for 83 (more than 40 percent) of the 200 most popular prescription products.

For patients, the important issues were not profits, wounded egos, or even high prices (Panalba is not sold under a generic name) but a risk of adverse reactions that is at least doubled by the use of two antibiotics when one suffices. "The real 'gut' issues of the antibiotic combination controversy are exceedingly simple," Commissioner Ley said in a speech in February. "Are we in this country dedicated to a rational, scientific basis of antibiotic therapy or are we dedicated to contributing unnecessarily to the 1,500,000 hospital admissions annually attributed to adverse reactions to drugs?" This view was solidly supported in the medical-scientific community. Five NAS–NRC panels, appointed at FDA's request to review all available evidence on the efficacy of anti-infective agents, concluded that mixtures are ineffective as fixed-ratio combinations because none is more effective than its components used separately. In fact, all 30 members of the panels concluded unanimously that these products "no longer belong in the therapeutic armamentarium" and should be removed from the market. The panel chairmen and Dr. Louis Weinstein, author of the "Microbial Diseases" section of the authoritative *Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics*, in affidavits filed with Judge Kent, said that scientific literature contains no adequate, well-controlled studies to support the claims made for antibiotic combinations. This is the position held "without exception by the outstanding experts in the antibiotic field," said panel chairman William M. M. Kirby, a professor of medicine at the University of Washington. According to another panel chairman, Dr. Heinz F. Eichenwald of the University of Texas, Dallas, "There are few instances in medicine when so many experts have agreed unanimously and without reservation." None of this was any surprise, because the experts had been denouncing fixed-ratio antibiotic products from the time the FDA allowed them to enter the market, starting almost two decades ago. The combinations, of course, have the appeal of "convenience" to practitioners who prefer "shotgun" therapy to painstaking diagnosis. But such alleged advantages come at the price of preventable injury to patients who get an antibiotic they do not need, or who cannot get enough of a component they do need without also getting more of another potent agent they do not need.

The issues raised by the antibiotic combinations have, with extraordinary clarity, exposed a conflict between profit and principle in the American Medical Association. For at least a dozen years AMA's respected Council on Drugs has condemned fixed-ratio preparations as "irrational." On 16 May, by unanimous vote, the Council endorsed the stand of the NAS–NRC. In 1960 a former chairman of the Council, Dr. Harry F. Dowling of the University of Illinois, told an AMA meeting that none of the antibiotic combinations "is justified." Even as he spoke, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (*JAMA*)