

of the Rockefeller Foundation. The steering committee under Professor Bunting of Reading consists of eminent agriculturists from both sides of the Atlantic. It is drawing up a timetable for ten days of intensive and, it hopes, constructive work on improvements in agriculture. Case studies of various agricultural projects in areas of both high and low productivity will be presented, in the hope that some general principles will emerge as to how best to improve farming methods in unproductive areas. Technical knowledge is available to improve crops, in some cases to three times the present level, but the best means of applying new methods are as yet undefined. It is hoped that constructive suggestions will emerge during discussion at the seminar, which will be attended by about 150 people, including economists, educationists, sociologists and agriculturists. The steering committee hopes that by restricting the attendance at the seminar, results will be produced. Detailed reports of the proceedings will be published.

Airlines Grounded

THE latest victims of economic hardship in the United Kingdom are the airlines, whose operating figures for the first half of 1967 do not show the usual healthy upward trend. Compared with the same period in 1966, the number of passengers carried has risen by only 2.2 per cent to 5.46 million—in recent years, increases have been nearer 10 to 15 per cent a year. Although the airlines have increased their capacity by 8.6 per cent to 7,051 million seat miles, passenger miles have only increased by 5.3 per cent to 3,915 million. Freight carried has dropped by 13.5 per cent to 149,309 short tons, although total load has risen by 5.2 per cent to 523.4 million short ton miles.

The worst hit seem to have been the shorthaul services within Europe. Comparing the June 1966 and June 1967 figures, British European Airways have carried 6.6 per cent fewer passengers, and the load factor is down from 67.4 per cent to 60.1 per cent. In the same period, freight fell by 26.8 per cent and mail by 29.1 per cent. The private companies fared even worse; freight fell by 36 per cent, and mail by 60 per cent. Although the seamen's strike in June 1966 gave the airlines extra traffic which they could not expect to maintain, the figures show that the weight of cargo carried has increased very little over the past five years. Longhaul services, fortunately, do not seem to have been as badly affected. BOAC carried 3.3 per cent more passengers, and 6.1 per cent more mail, but 10.7 per cent less freight.

The real blow to the airlines seems to have been in the holiday business. The inclusive tours to Europe expanded only modestly this year, although the annual increase has usually been between 40 and 80 per cent per year.

Since inclusive tours can be paid for in sterling, it is unlikely that the £50 currency limit can be blamed. In any case, it is the less expensive tours which have been hardest hit, which suggests that general economic conditions have dictated a holiday at home for many who might otherwise have gone abroad. Within Britain, improved rail services have affected airline traffic. With these latest statistics, it is easy to see why the Air Transport Licensing Board recently sanctioned increases in fares.

Social Science at Boston Spa

ELEVEN miles of library shelving were added to the existing twenty-five when Mr Patrick Gordon-Walker, Secretary of State for Education and Science, opened a new extension of the National Lending Library for Science and Technology at Boston Spa, Lincolnshire, on October 5. At the same time, a new service for social scientists was inaugurated. From now on the library will hold journals and periodicals devoted exclusively to the social sciences as well as those previously held in which the subject was mentioned. There are at present no plans to build up a stock of social science books but, following the report on libraries by the University Grants Committee, the future policy of the library is under discussion.

More than 500,000 requests have been dealt with in the past year, for photocopying papers, as well as borrowing books, and the stock of 650,000 volumes makes the library the largest scientific lending library in Europe. A new list has just been published of the 28,000 current periodicals that are held by the library.

Efficient use of scientific information becomes more important each year as the volume of literature increases, and the staff of the library have for several years been organizing courses of instruction in this field. The first courses, five years ago, were held for research students, but became impossibly over-subscribed. The present plan is to instruct academic staff and university librarians in the hope that they can run courses for their own students. In the meantime, the library is using modern handling techniques such as conveyor belts, and is streamlining cataloguing methods so that requests for information can be dealt with in the fastest possible way.

Foundation for Prosperity

THE Wolfson Foundation has decided in principle to set aside up to £500,000 over the next five years for agreed projects in applied science education which in the judgment of the trustees are most likely to improve the economic position of the United Kingdom and help the modernization of British industry. It is intended that universities should apply for quite substantial sums of money to carry out specific projects of this kind and it is apparently understood that the total sum now allocated is unlikely to be able to support more than half a dozen projects or so. At the same time, the trustees of the foundation are breaking new ground by their determination to seek out, by discussion with universities, proposals for projects that will qualify for support. In deciding where to place money, the foundation has apparently decided that it will give particularly favourable consideration to universities which have established in the natural course of events close relationships with local industries.

The motive behind this new development is the argument that the Government and the foundations have in the past twenty years done much to stimulate academic research and have, unwittingly, contributed in the process to the strong emphasis on academic problems now apparent in university research of various kinds. In its new work, which will consume somewhat less than half of what the foundation is likely to spend in the next five years on higher education as a whole, the Wolfson Foundation is looking for kinds of research