

Parliament in Britain

Defence Appointments

FIVE university appointments financed by the Ministry of Defence have so far been created. Mr G. W. Reynolds, Minister of Defence for Administration, said that arrangements had been made with Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Southampton Universities, King's College (London) and All Souls' College (Oxford) to appoint an additional member of staff to specialize in the defence aspects of his discipline. The ministry's grant is initially awarded for five years and will be reviewed at the end of this period. Responsibility for the appointment is the university's. The ministry encourages the publication of results unless classified information is involved. (Written answer, November 22.)

Influenza Vaccine

ASKED what resources the Government has to deal with the threatened spread of Hong Kong influenza to Britain by about Christmas, Mr D. Ennals, Minister of State in the Department of Health and Social Security, said that the vaccination was desirable for people suffering from chronic diseases like bronchitis, tuberculosis, heart and renal diseases and diabetes. The supply of A2 virus vaccine is not likely to meet

all possible demands for it. (Written answer, November 22.)

Mentally Handicapped Children

MEMBERS of the House welcomed the Prime Minister's statement that responsibility for the education of mentally handicapped children will be transferred from the health to the education service. No change is necessary in Scotland where the education authorities are already responsible. The Prime Minister said that the necessary legislation would be prepared as soon as possible. (Oral answer, November 26.)

Fuel Supplies

THE Economist Intelligence Unit's study of Britain's energy supplies, recommending that the production of coal should not decline as fast as the Fuel Policy White Paper suggested, has been studied by officials in the Ministry of Power. But Mr Mason, the Minister of Power, said that he did not accept its conclusions or that it invalidated the Government's White Paper. (Written answer, November 26.)

Hovertrain

TRACKED HOVERCRAFT LIMITED is to get an extra £1.5 million to produce an experimental manned vehicle on a track several miles long. Announcing this, Mr Mallalieu added that the question of fast transport to and from airports was seriously being considered. (Oral answer, November 27.)

New Constitution for British Physicists

THE quaintly named organization which has been known as "The Institute of Physics and The Physical Society" for the past eight years may quite soon be called simply the Institute of Physics, and outsiders will no doubt welcome that simplification of a complicated world. The change of name, however, is only one of several proposals for change which constitute a package formally approved at an extraordinary general meeting held in London last week, on November 27. The new developments centre on a proposal by the council of the Institute of Physics and the Physical Society (referred to in what follows as the Organization) to apply to the Privy Council for a Royal Charter. The immediate effect of this would be to change the basis of incorporation of the Organization, which is at present registered as a limited company with the Board of Trade, but there is also strong feeling among many influential members that the role of the Organization as a learned society will in the process be emasculated. Some of this opposition bubbled to the surface of the general meeting, and was no doubt charged with some of the resentment among members of the Organization at the haste with which the meeting appears to have been called—the advance notice was only two days more than the statutory minimum.

The origin of the Organization is to be found in the late fifties, when there were powerful arguments in favour of the merger of the Physical Society, a learned society, and the Institute of Physics, a professional body concerned with the professional status of physicists and competent to award to its members professional qualifications similar to those awarded by the engineering institutions. Although the members (or

Fellows) of the Physical Society were mostly academics and the members (Graduates, Associates and Fellows) of the Institute were mostly at work in industry, the overlap between the two bodies was considerable—both of them, for example, were accustomed to organize scientific meetings which would necessarily appeal to members of both bodies. Discussions about an amalgamation of the society and the institute were well under way in 1959, when the presidents of the organizations were, respectively, Mr J. A. Ratcliffe and Sir George Thomson.

Although the amalgamation of the two bodies which was finally carried out early in 1960 made it possible for the Organization to begin with a much stronger executive arm, and although the council of the Organization brought together (as it still does) physicists with roots in the Physical Society and the Institute of Physics, the activities of the two organizations remained more or less parallel to each other. Fellows of the Physical Society remained Fellows of the Physical Society, while the grades of membership of the Institute of Physics, which implied professional status of a kind, also kept their separate identity. Only the non-voting student members were shared indistinguishably by the two amalgamated societies.

Those who now resent the proposals which go along with the application for a Royal Charter say that when the merger took place, there was a "gentleman's agreement" that this parallel coexistence would continue. One resentful member says that he has, for the past eight years, regarded the Organization as a federation, not an amalgamation. From this point of view, the most striking of the new proposals are those