

general meeting last week, and the locomotive engineers were all set to do the same at a similar meeting this week. The Institution of Locomotive Engineers differs from the larger body in which it is likely to dominate the Railway Division by being a learned society rather than a professional association, and a great many members of the one are already professionally qualified members of the other. What seems to have happened is that economic pressures have now persuaded the locomotive engineers that they could operate more effectively from the influential base which the Institution of Mechanical Engineers will provide. No doubt the locomotive engineers have also been influenced by the increased status which has accrued to those engineering institutions which belong to the Council of Engineering Institutions, and whose corporate members can now call themselves Chartered Engineers, or C.Eng. for short. The small proportion of the members of the Institution of Locomotive Engineers who are professionally unqualified will not immediately acquire this privilege; until they win approval, possibly by examination, such members will not be corporate members of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers.

The tortuous character of these relationships is proof of the chequered history of the institutions—the locomotive engineers were formed in 1911 as a splinter group from the Stephenson Society in much the same way that in 1847 Stephenson himself led the railway builders and their associates out of the Institution of Civil Engineers to form what is now the Institution of Mechanical Engineers. Since then, engineering institutions have proliferated, and it seems to be uncommonly difficult to bring them into harmony. The Institution of Heating and Ventilating Engineers, for example, is still out in the cold, neither a member of the Council of Engineering Institutions nor an affiliate of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers. It is now more than a year since talks of a merger between the two bodies broke down, with a good deal of genteel recrimination, and the heating and ventilating engineers have since been pushing ahead with their application for a Royal Charter—the qualification they will need to become members in their own right of the Council of Engineering Institutions. Paradoxically, the heating and ventilating engineers may have a stronger case for the administration of a qualifying examination independently of the universities than many of the other institutions, for there seem to be only two institutions—Strathclyde University and the Borough Polytechnic—at which suitable training courses are at present provided.

The Council of Engineering Institutions itself is also now in the thick of trying to decide what kind of institution membership should be made available to technicians as distinct from fully qualified engineers. A committee of the CEI has been at work for the past year on an examination of this problem—the most likely outcome will be a suggestion that technicians should fill specially designed grades of membership within the institutions. The Institution of Heating and Ventilating Engineers is already planning to strike out on its own in this direction. The more important question is whether the engineering institutions will be able to exercise a beneficial influence on the training of engineering technicians—the statutory creation of the Industrial Training Boards in the past two years

has not yet demonstrated that the training boards really know what training should consist of. It would be excellent if the engineering institutions could provide some help, although as they are at present organized there seems very little hope of that.

The Institution of Mechanical Engineers itself is doing reasonably well. Membership has risen by 1,600 to nearly 70,000. The accounts continue to show a surplus of rather more than £20,000, which is no mean achievement even for an organization whose assets are worth more than £500,000. Even so, the institution is looking to the joint secretarial services which the CEI is hoping to organize to provide some relief, in the year ahead, from the pressure of mounting inflation.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Cancer in Public

PEOPLE who fear they have cancer may develop a mental block which enables them to ignore warning signs and obvious symptoms. This unconscious refusal to accept unpleasant reality can lead to considerable delay in obtaining a reliable medical opinion and an associated—and frequently dangerous—delay in treatment. Dr John Hinton, professor of psychiatry at Middlesex Hospital, made these points at the first symposium of the British Cancer Council held at the Royal College of Surgeons on March 26.

The British Cancer Council is the official British representative at the International Union against Cancer. It was set up in 1968 by the British Association for Cancer Research to take the place of the National Committee on Cancer, disbanded in 1966. The British Association for Cancer Research is mainly concerned with experimental research. The new council was set up with the object of dealing with cancer and its associated problems on a much broader front. It seeks to disseminate information about all aspects of cancer research and treatment and to raise money to make a suitable subscription to the International Union.

Dr Graham Bennette, general secretary of the council, stressed the importance of providing new avenues of communication between specialists in diverse aspects of cancer research. Ways must be found of making research into different aspects of cancer intelligible and meaningful to workers in other disciplines. The plan is to hold an annual symposium and to circulate reports from a number of working parties—the first of them, already at work, is concerned appropriately with information exchange. No attempt will be made, as yet, to provide a cancer information service for the general public—the council lacks the funds for such a project and fears that its useful work would in any case be swamped by requests for help and advice. The council is also hoping to cultivate better relations with the press, chiefly by making available sources of authoritative opinion.

The majority of the council's member organizations are public charities. The council will make no public appeal for funds, therefore, but depends on private subscriptions. The sum required annually is about £20,000, of which £10,000 is the recommended subscription to the International Union against Cancer. Last year the council was able to pay £2,000, the largest amount yet paid officially by Britain.