

NUCLEAR REORGANIZATION

View of TNPG

MR ARTHUR PALMER, chairman of the House of Commons subcommittee which is investigating the nuclear power industry, and Sir Edwin McAlpine, chairman of the Nuclear Power Group (TNPG), greeted each other like old friends at last week's session. Sir Edwin was in an expansive mood. First he surprised the subcommittee with the declaration that he, at least, is more than delighted with the way the controversial reorganization of the industry is going. Then he took a swipe at the boiler-making companies—"behaving like a lot of blacksmiths", he said, and not likely to make any notable technical progress in the atomic field. Even Mr Airey Neave, whose interest in the industry encompasses a seat on the subcommittee and a directorship of the John Thompson boiler company, managed to put on a smile. But Sir Edwin refused to be tempted into indiscretions on the disaster at Dungeness B. Part of the trouble was that the tender for the advanced gas-cooled reactor at Dungeness B had been rushed through in a hurry, but he was optimistic about the future of AGRs. The problem of exporting nuclear power stations in the teeth of American competition was also aired, and there was a plea for an investigation of the royalties which the nuclear industry has to pay to the Atomic Energy Authority. Sir Edwin ensured that the meeting was less like an inquisition than its predecessors.

Mr S. A. Ghalib, managing director of TNPG, took over the explanation of export problems. TNPG is trying to sell an advanced gas-cooled reactor to South Korea, but the Koreans have given a letter of intent to Westinghouse for a pressurized water reactor. Mr Ghalib thought that the AGR was competitive with the Westinghouse tender, and agreed that American political influence was involved. But he was hopeful that the Korean decision could be reversed, because

one of the conditions of the deal is that Westinghouse arranges a loan for about 90 per cent of the cost of the station, and this they are finding hard to do. Westinghouse is looking round for help and a British company has been asked to provide the station's generators and some long-term credit. If the credit is forthcoming from Britain, TNPG will have lost its chance of getting the contract. But Mr Ghalib seemed optimistic that TNPG could win the contract in the end.

The reason why Sir Edwin is so scornful of the boiler-makers stems from the failure of the attempted merger between three boiler companies (International Combustion Holdings, Clarke Chapman and John Thompson) which the Industrial Reorganization Corporation instigated and which was to have been the linchpin of the reorganization. Sir Edwin thought that the proposed boiler merger was "a lot of nonsense" from the start, but once the IRC realized its mistake the reshaping of the industry "went like a bomb". The industry could not have carried out the reorganization without the help of the IRC, which had done a good job. He was full of praise for the IRC and AEA representatives on the board of TNPG. But there were plaintive noises about the royalties which have to be paid to the AEA when a reactor is sold. TNPG's competitors in the United States and Germany did not have to bear this burden, and it was all extra pounds on the jockey's back. The subcommittee, however, thought AEA's tithe sensible.

Predictably, TNPG want to see the building of a commercial steam generating heavy water reactor in Britain. An SGHW station built as a joint project between Eire and Northern Ireland would make a lot of sense, Sir Edwin thought, and it is virtually impossible to sell an SGHW abroad until one has been ordered for the home shop window. The prospects are gloomy, however. The electricity boards already have more than enough spare capacity, and there is no intention of starting on a new power station for commissioning in 1974-75.

two-thirds saved would instead be distributed as a further general pay rise, which in a full year would cost £1.2 million. The award has been back-dated to October 1, 1968, and the merit awards will be effective from April 1, 1969. Professors' pay will not be increased overall but they will be eligible for a 4 per cent distinction award. Mrs Williams added that the Government hopes that the universities will allocate merit awards solely along the lines suggested by the PIB.

Kew Gardens

MR J. MACKIE, for the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, assured Mr A. Royle that the Government had no plans for altering public access to Kew Gardens, which had been given to the nation by Queen Victoria. He said that over the past twenty years the annual number of visitors had been around a million. (Written answer, April 30.)

Concorde

MR J. P. W. MALLALIEU, for the Ministry of Technology, said that he would make an announcement if

Concorde is to be tested at supersonic speeds over land. He said nineteen supersonic flights had taken place over the Wash area in the past two months. These were part of the continuing research into supersonic flight by both military and civil aircraft. Mr W. Rodgers, for the Board of Trade, said that good progress was made last year in drawing up a tripartite certification plan between the US, France and Britain for noise levels of future generations of subsonic jet aircraft. Discussions are to be resumed shortly and the hope is to introduce an internationally acceptable scheme to ensure the introduction of progressively quieter aircraft. (Written and oral answers, April 28 and 30.)

Forestry Commission

MR G. THOMAS, for the Ministry of Agriculture, said that between 1959 and 1968 the forest land in England and Wales held by the commission had increased from 281,000 acres to 332,000 acres while the number of industrial workers employed had fallen from 3,107 to 1,843. (Written answer, April 28.)