

large stress on anniversary tributes, the Warsaw meeting gave relatively small space to these honorifics, and the main feature of the opening session was the speech of Jan Kaczmarek, chairman of the Committee of Science and Technology. In his speech, Chairman Kaczmarek stressed in particular the necessity for working out methods of automating Polish industry to ensure optimum productivity, and also discussed the importance of increasing the effectiveness of industry-orientated scientific and technological research. The financial problems inherent in such research were stressed: the appropriation for such research in the period 1969-75 will increase at a rate in excess of the rate of increase of the national income. In 1975, the proposed expenditure on research projects will be at least 25 milliard zloty (£430 million), which is twice the 1969 appropriation. In view of this increase, it is not surprising that much of the latter part of Chairman Kaczmarek's speech was devoted to practical and financial problems: improvement of the organization and structure of the scientific basis of industry, organization of education and training, and the stimulation of initiative and "commitment" of scientific workers. In the discussion which followed, Henryk Japłowski, Minister of Education, stressed the need for a "confrontation with the principal aims" of the Polish economy, the financial coordination of research projects and the revision of technical training programmes in institutes of higher education in accordance with the needs and trends of current technology.

Both Chairman Kaczmarek and the speakers in the discussion raised the question of international cooperation on scientific and technological problems (with special reference, of course, to the Soviet Union and other countries of the Soviet bloc), but this topic seemed less important than the main subject of Polish financing of Polish industry. Clearly, the current expenditure is seen as a self-liquidating project, which will ultimately repay the initial investment by greater returns from industry, brought about by automation, rationalization and the introduction of new and more efficient methods. It is interesting to note, however, that while the Soviet Union still (at least in its publicity) seems to treat all scientific and technological progress (from sputniks to fish-spotting and from television sets to trans-continental pipelines) as primarily "prestige" achievements, at least one of her Socialist-bloc neighbours regards such progress from the practical and pragmatic basis of financial outlay and projected material returns

AIRPORTS

Bold Plans from New Group

Two independent companies are to join forces in an attempt to add more weight to the arguments for building London's third airport at Foulness. They are the Thames Aeroport Group, a large consortium of companies backed by private investment, and Bernard L. Clark and Partners, a group of civil engineering consultants. This new group, which will operate as the Thames Aeroport Group, has submitted proposals to the Roskill Commission for a combined major airport and seaport on reclaimed land at Foulness, in the Thames Estuary. The Roskill Commission is at present investigating the suitability of sites at Foulness, Wing, Nuthampstead and Thurleigh.

Thames Aeroport Group's proposals are for a major seaport, on the lines of the massive Dutch Europort complex, and an airport to be built on fifty-six square miles of reclaimed land. The seaport would be capable of accommodating huge million-ton tankers and would provide an obvious location for a major container terminal. In fact, Mr F. Stower, chairman of the Thames Aeroport Group consultants team, said that the seaport may well be more important than the airport, and Mr Bernard Clark emphasized this by saying that every acre of Holland's Europort provides £10,000 of business a year. The proposals also include a terminal for the airport, situated between St Katherine's and London docks, linked to the airport by a fast road and rail service through the North Thames docks area.

Mr Clark indicated that much of the engineering studies on the project have already been done, and an economic survey is now needed. Such a survey will be carried out by the Netherlands Economic Institute, under contract to the group. The institute has carried out similar surveys for the World Bank, the EEC Development Fund, and several governments, and its president, Professor Leo H. Klaassen, has said that priority would be given to the Thames Aeroport Group's Foulness proposals.

The formation of this new consortium means that there are now two main contenders for possible development of the Foulness site: Thames Aeroport Group and Thames Estuary Development Company (TEDCO), both of which will be making proposals to the Roskill Commission. Sir William Gorell Barnes, Thames Aeroport Group's chairman, took pains to point out, however, that the new consortium hopes to avoid intense competition between interested companies, because this might prejudice the chances of Foulness being accepted for the airport. It seems, however, that TEDCO are not enthusiastic about cooperation with Thames Aeroport, and, on the other hand, Thames Aeroport have stopped exchanging information with TEDCO. Sir William claims that the two consortia are not duplicating each other's work to a great extent but, as they are both submitting plans for similar installations, that viewpoint is rather difficult to see. Moreover, TEDCO have already studied the possibilities for a combined seaport and industrial complex at Foulness (see *Nature*, 221, 702; 1969), and have come up with plans which bear a marked resemblance to the proposals made by the Thames Aeroport Group.

MEDICINES

New Medicines Commission

THE thirteen members of the new Medicines Commission, which under the 1968 Medicines Act will advise the British Government on all matters relating to the safety, efficacy and quality of all drugs intended for human and veterinary use, have now been appointed and hope to have their first meeting before the end of the year. The chairman of the commission will be Sir Derrick Dunlop, who has been chairman of the Committee on Safety of Drugs since it was established in 1963 and which has been responsible for the voluntary cooperation between the drug manufacturers, the medical profession and the government.

Under the new Act, the government will introduce

legislation to extend the present system of voluntary controls on the safety of drugs in relation to their efficacy to a licensing system to control the marketing of all drugs. A licensing body under the Ministers for Health, for Agriculture and for Scotland will be responsible for issuing licences for clinical trials and for the release of new drugs and devices such as metal or plastic implants. Products already on the market will be automatically licensed, but their use will be gradually reviewed. Where the drug has a new principle, or there is some doubt as to its safety, efficacy or specification, it would be referred to one of the specialist committees. It seems likely that there will be a committee for the safety of drugs which may essentially be the present committee enlarged to include veterinary products, or may include two subcommittees for human and for veterinary products. Another committee would have to be responsible for the control of the quality of drugs and it would be this committee that would take over the direction of future editions of the British Pharmacopoeia from the General Medical Council. This may well be one of the first committees to begin its work and it is hoped that it will do so by February next year. Other committees, probably including one to advise on methods of inspection and on devices, will be formed in due course. The hope is that the whole system should become operational within about two years.

The commission will advise the ministers on the general pattern for these committees, and it can recommend people to serve on it. It will also hear appeals by applicants for licences against decisions by the expert committees.

It is hoped that by keeping the committees small, and not requiring them to examine every application in detail, the system will remain flexible. One question in doubt is the extent to which the commission will be responsible for classifying the relative efficacies of different drugs or for publishing the information for medical practitioners. There is an independent committee under Professor MacGregor which classifies drugs and issues a proprietary list and this may, in line with the recommendations of the Sainsbury report, come under the aegis of the committee. Another recommendation made in the Sainsbury report was that the commission should prepare information for doctors on new drugs before these are advertised. No provision is made for this in the new Act, but the commission will consider producing a journal such as the present *Prescribers Journal* in which information on drugs will be presented to practitioners.

MEDICAL STATISTICS

New Clothes for Old Body

THE Medical Research Council's newly announced Statistical Research and Services Unit, housed in the University College Hospital Medical School in London, is remarkably similar to the Statistical Unit it was intended to replace. Only the size is different—the scientific staff now numbers three instead of nine. According to the director, Dr I. Sutherland, the unit will make explicit a function of advising other MRC establishments on statistical problems; previously this aid had always been given but was subordinated to the unit's own research.

The change of title came when Dr Richard Doll, who

directed the Statistical Unit, took up the Regius Chair of Medicine at the University of Oxford at the beginning of July. With him went three of the unit's scientists and several of its research projects, mainly those dealing with cancer and the relation of thromboembolism to the contraceptive pill. Two more of the staff have transferred their affiliations to the MRC Clinical Research Centre, which should be opening at Harrow next year but at present consists of several divisions scattered around London.

Those who remain will still be pursuing a number of research lines on a budget of whose size Dr Sutherland says "nobody has the faintest idea". The work is to include the development and evaluation of statistical techniques for biological and medical data, and—for the moment—epidemiology, although this will eventually be dropped. New topics are expected later, when the staff rises to its projected size of five or six. There may also be cooperation with the MRC Computer Unit which was founded earlier this year, although the links so far are limited to borrowing computer facilities.

SELECT COMMITTEES

New Enquiries

THE eagle eye of the Select Committee on Science and Technology will this year be turned on the problems of population growth in the United Kingdom, while the Select Committee on Education and Science will tackle teacher training. The Select Committee on Science and Technology has also announced that it will be looking into an aspect of the computer industry and into atmospheric and river pollution, and it has appointed two sub-committees to resume the examination of the UK space research programme and to look at recent developments in carbon fibre technology. The committee, which was re-appointed only last week, has not yet decided on which aspects of these complex fields to concentrate, but its inquiries into the computer industry and the space research programme will probably involve examination of the prospects for European cooperation, and the carbon fibre inquiry is likely to be dominated by a recent decision of Imperial Chemical Industries not to produce the material.

The Select Committee on Education and Science began its inquiry into teacher training last session, and its decision to carry on is no surprise. It will be welcomed by the National Union of Teachers and by the National Union of Students, which have both campaigned for such an inquiry. The decision, however, follows hard on the heels of Mr Edward Short's statement that the Department of Education and Science is unlikely to institute an inquiry of its own.

The Select Committee on Science and Technology will have the following members: Mr David Ginsberg, Mr. Arnold Gregory, Mr Frank Hooley, Mr Robert L. Howarth, Mr Michael Jopling, Mr Ted Ledbitter, Sir Harry Legge-Bourke, Mr Eric Lubbock, Mr Patrick McNair-Wilson, Mr Eric Moonman, Mr Airey Neave, Mr Arthur Palmer (chairman), Mr Brian Parkyn and Mr David Price. Members of the Select Committee on Education and Science are: Mr Walter Aldritt, Mr Ronald Bell, Mr Donald Dewar, Mr Richard Hornby, Mr Gilbert Longden, Mr Kenneth Marks, Mr Richard Mitchell, Mr Trevor Park, Mr Christopher Price, Mr Arnold Shaw, Mr van Straubenzee, Mr Frederick Willey (chairman) and Mr Esmond Wright.