

As an example of the SRC's policy towards the growing number of interdisciplinary activities, Professor Flowers explained how control engineering had been concentrated into three main centres, at Cambridge, Imperial College and the Manchester Institute of Technology, each with extensive computing facilities. The SRC had invested more than half a million pounds in the Cambridge control group alone, where industrial applications have included a model of a hot steel strip rolling mill and the control of once through boilers required in the nuclear power field. Computing science is one of the major emerging disciplines where the SRC is spending more than £2 million, with major groups centred in Edinburgh, Manchester and Cambridge.

The SRC was also increasing its interest in social problems, Professor Flowers said. On the study of transport systems, he hinted that with the findings of the SRC review panel at present under discussion it was likely that the SRC would be able to double its present commitment of £280,000 in this field. The SRC would also participate in defining the role of the new transport and environment centre, recommended in Lady Sharp's recent report *The Men for the Job* and now accepted by the government. The deliberate exploitation of spin-off was another important factor in SRC policy, Sir Brian said, but despite the growing preoccupation with applied science the SRC had no intention of neglecting the pure sciences. He also hoped that pure mathematics would be resuscitated under the new Science Board.

Lord Bowden, replying to Professor Flowers, said that he greatly welcomed the SRC's new posture on engineering. He could never understand the logic of the Haldane Report of 1918, for so long the bible of the research councils, in which the control of research was vested in those who had no interest in the outcome. "It's like entrusting the direction of Covent Garden to someone primarily interested in acoustics", he said.

He thought the idea of the University Grants Committee and the SRC working under different philosophies was a constructive one, with the UGC trying to spread grants evenly and SRC being selective according to merit. But pure science was still getting too much of the cake. He suggested that astronomy should be financed by the Arts Council as it satisfied the required test of giving considerable intellectual satisfaction to a tiny fraction of the community.

#### EDUCATION

### Royal Society's Committee

THE Royal Society has underlined its interest in education with two new initiatives. It has appointed a full-time education officer and set up a standing committee on education under the chairmanship of Professor C. C. Butler. Professor Butler, who was joint chairman of the working party of the Schools Council and the Standing Committee on University Entrance which put forward the controversial proposals for "Q" and "F" level examinations, has said that the new committee would be concerned with all levels of education. It will help to coordinate the work of the various joint committees of the Royal Society concerned with education, and will also look at specific problems itself.

Such a committee seems to be a logical development of the Royal Society's greatly expanded activities in education during the past few years. It already has joint committees with the Royal Institute of Chemistry, the Institute of Biology and the Institute of Physics, which are concerned with education in chemistry, biology and physics respectively. A joint committee of the Royal Society, the Council of Engineering Institutions and the Council of Science and Technology Institutes recently reported on the shortage of science and mathematics teachers in schools. Professor Butler said that the committee, which has met only once, has no specific problems under investigation as yet.

#### CONSERVATION

### Environmental Revolution on Film

EUROPEAN Conservation Year has had a good week. While royalty and politicians were conferring in Strasbourg, Shell-Mex and BP Ltd was unveiling its contribution towards the education of the general public, a thirty minute colour film called *Environment in the Balance*, which had its premiere on February 11. This is the second film in a series on changing Britain and seeks to put the problems of today's environment in the context of Britain's history. The film modestly refrains from mentioning the battle against oil pollution. The figure, taken from the film, shows China clay spoil heaps in Cornwall.



#### IONOSPHERE

### Omega off the Ground

from our Soviet Correspondent

ON February 5, a new joint Franco-Soviet experiment was launched, designed to investigate near-space and the Earth's magnetic field, using a combination of drifting balloons and ground-level observations. This experiment, the first stage of the much publicized "Omega" project, is based on ground stations near Karpogor (Arkhangelsk province) in north Russia and the French base on the Kerguelen islands in the sub-antarctic Indian Ocean. Taking part in the experiments are specialists from the Soviet Institute of Terrestrial Magnetism, Ionosphere and Radio-waves, Institute of Terrestrial Physics, Polar Geophysical Institute, Leningrad and Gor'kii Universities and the French Centre National d'Études Spatiales, University of Toulouse