

Navigable Waters Bill has already made a start by providing for an increase from £1,000 to £5,000 in the fine on summary conviction for the master of a ship which illegally discharges oil into the sea.

CS GAS

Infringing the Gas Laws

THE British government's decision to regard CS gas as being outside the scope of the Geneva Protocol on chemical and bacteriological weapons came under attack from several quarters at a meeting of the British Pugwash Group last week. It was unfortunate that the debate took place in something of a vacuum since the top billing for the meeting, Lord Chalfont, was prevented by the election from explaining the logic of the government's position and no understudy from the Foreign Office was prepared to stand in at short notice. Lord Chalfont's absence forced participants to speculate about the official reasons behind the decision, and most of them had considerable difficulty in finding any logical arguments to back it up.

Professor Andrew Martin, QC, professor of international law at the University of Southampton, argued that the decision cannot really be justified on the grounds that CS is, in Mr Stewart's words, "not significantly harmful, except in exceptional circumstances", because the Geneva Protocol itself makes no distinction between lethal and non-lethal weapons. The protocol prohibits the use in war of "asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases, and of all analogous liquids, materials or devices", and its interpretation hinges to some extent on the phrase "other gases"—particularly because the equally authentic French version uses the phrase "ou similaires". In 1930, the British government issued a memorandum in which it said that tear gases fall within the scope of the protocol, and last July U Thant, Secretary General of the UN, called upon member states to make a clear affirmation that the protocol applies to all chemical, bacteriological and biological agents. What, then, has induced the British government to reverse its former declaration and to ignore U Thant's plea?

One of the more popular explanations canvassed at the meeting was that the government was considerably embarrassed by using CS to control its own citizens in Ulster, and at the same time giving an undertaking not to use it against an enemy in wartime. But in any case, there is nothing in the protocol which prohibits its use for riot control, and the government was not acting illegally. Moreover, France stated categorically last December that it regards CS as prohibited in warfare, in spite of the fact that it is often employed for riot control in the streets of Paris. Another explanation which seemed plausible to some was that the British government's decision was in part a gesture of solidarity with the US, which has never signed the Geneva Protocol and is using vast quantities of CS on the battlefield in Vietnam.

The most logical explanation for the government's decision is, however, that it believes that CS is more humane than bullets for overcoming an enemy. But even this explanation sounded less than convincing to most participants at the meeting, because it is invariably used in wartime in conjunction with conventional weapons, and is therefore often just a forerunner to

bullets. In any case, the lack of published material about the toxicity of CS gave rise to fundamental disagreements among the speakers about the dangers of using the weapon. Professor R. B. Fisher, of the University of Edinburgh, for example, maintained that the concentration of CS needed to cause significant physiological damage is several orders of magnitude greater than the concentration that can be tolerated, and that it is therefore unlikely that anybody could be exposed for long enough to suffer serious harm, unless he were incapacitated. On the other hand, figures quoted by Dr Julian Perry Robinson and Dr G. R. N. Jones suggest that doses of CS which would cause serious damage and even death might be much lower than Professor Fisher's estimates. The effect of CS on the eyes is also rather uncertain.

In any case, as Professor Fisher pointed out, it is illogical to campaign against CS on its own. The most important issue is to get the government to state that all chemical agents, including tear gases, are covered by the Geneva Protocol.

ZOOS

Acknowledged to Exist

THE response of the British government to the management consultants who recommended financial aid for the Zoological Society has been to provide £1,350,000 towards rebuilding and payments of debts, and to waive repayment of a loan of £125,000 made to the Society in 1964. Mr John Silkin, Minister of Public Building and Works, acknowledged in the House of Commons last week that the zoo has become, in fact if not in form, a national institution which is an important London amenity and tourist attraction.

The management consultants were called in by Mr Silkin's predecessor, Mr Anthony Greenwood, who announced last year a short-term government loan of £375,000 for the Zoological Society. This was in recognition of the mounting financial difficulties of a society that had always remained independent of government subsidy. The society's spectacular success in raising £3.5 million during the past ten years had not been enough to avoid deficits of £30,000 in 1968 and £54,000 last year.

After examining the details of the society's affairs at London Zoo and Whipsnade Park, the consultants passed the organization with a clean bill of health, and concluded that financial stability could be achieved in the longer term with government help and the continuation of efforts to cut costs and increase revenue. The government was recommended to repay the short-term debts incurred by the society's extensive rebuilding programme, which reached the half way mark two years ago with the opening of a new small mammal house. A contribution to the cost of the remaining part of the rebuilding programme was also called for, and has been provided in the form of £700,000 to be spent during 1970-74. To repay the short-term debts, £650,000 will be provided from the Civil Contingencies Fund, and the government loan of £125,000 made to the society in 1964 will not now have to be repaid.

This money will complement the society's own efforts to make ends meet during the present time of trouble. Among the consultants' other proposals for increasing