

CORRESPONDENCE

Coal

SIR.—In your article, "The Biggest Lame Duck of All" (*Nature*, 240, 431; 1972), you make comments about the wisdom or otherwise of the measures now proposed for the British coal industry in the next few years. Your comments cover a range of topics from energy policy to the philosophy of control of the nationalized industries. These views will no doubt be given an appropriate place in the considerations of responsible individuals, including those who are concerned with the parliamentary stages of the Bill.

However, towards the end of the article, you ask why the new proposals have not been accompanied by some policy on research, a subject on which *Nature* would be expected to be well informed. I hope your readers will not be led to assume from this question that the National Coal Board lacks appropriate policies on research, especially in the field of future utilization technologies for coal. The Board's policy on research is not only a matter of prime concern to the Board itself but the appropriate Minister also has a statutory duty to satisfy himself that the research programmes of the NCB, along with those of other energy industries, are satisfactory. The Minister is advised on this by an advisory body having an eminent and expert independent Chairman and membership.

Furthermore, the Board has always made a great point of explaining its attitude to future developments in the role and modes of utilization of coal. Indeed the current Bill owes much to the growing acceptance not only that coal provides much the greatest reserve of fossil fuel but also that coal is capable of being used in a flexible fashion to replace other fuels, including liquid and gaseous fuels. The Board's research establishments are open to display the research work and to explain these policies. The laboratories have been regularly visited by numerous representatives of the press, government organizations, other related energy industries, and visitors from many countries. We have, incidentally, also made a point for a long time of presenting our proposed research and development programmes, before they are finally approved, annually to our National Consultative Committee, which is the representative body of our trade unions; this body also visits our laboratories and takes a deep interest in the work. The Board's research work and policies have also been widely publicized through lectures and articles in both professional and popular journals.

The consensus of international opinion certainly seems to indicate that the Board's current programme is sensible and that our longer range planning will allow us to develop our strategy as our opportunities expand, as we believe they will.

Nonetheless, the Board would still be willing to demonstrate its research work to *Nature* and to explain the reasons behind its policy. It would seem desirable that you should understand the facts before criticizing the policy of the Board, and indeed the Government, in this regard.

Yours faithfully,

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Developing Medicine

SIR.—The Cameroon Embassy would like to draw readers' attention to the fact that in addition to the training of highly qualified medical personnel (doctors, nurses, and so on), the University Centre for Health Sciences (CUSS) in Yaounde, Cameroon, also trains a large number of para-medical staff. In fact the CUSS complex is unique in Africa in that training involves all aspects of medical and sanitary sciences.

Nevertheless, the use of a large number of para-medical personnel should be and must be considered as a very temporary solution to health problems in developing countries. The ultimate aim is to have regular highly qualified medical personnel as soon as possible in as many medical and health centres as possible with the para-medical trained staff serving as complements to those centres.

In the colonial days, emphasis was laid on curative medicine only and well equipped hospitals and personnel. All these demanded a lot of money and technical assistance which was scarce in penurious developing countries.

The Government of the United Republic of Cameroon, aware of this situation, has reversed this policy and has rather laid more and greater emphasis and priority on preventive medicine. In this regard, in the current Five-Year Development Plan of Cameroon, priority has been given to the construction, extension and equipping of provincial hospitals; quantitative and qualitative improvement of the training of medical staff; development of preventive and curative medicine and a vigorous health education scheme for the masses.

The end result therefore would be

the extension of health services, including all forms of medicine, to cover the entire population both urban and rural. This will include treatment, prevention, education, etc. It is intended to build 30 divisional and sub-divisional hospitals and to construct or develop 165 rural health centres in Cameroon.

Thus the Development Plan of Cameroon is aimed at achieving equitable distribution and diversification of goods, services and human resources. Bilateral and multilateral aid is welcome but the ultimate goal is to drive towards self-reliance.

Yours faithfully,

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Vietnam Bombing

SIR.—Your editorial on consequences of the bombing in Vietnam (*Nature*, 241, 1; 1973) solves no problems but raises unnecessary puzzles of its own.

First of all, I cannot see how the hypothetical effect on the bombings on the coming Kennedy Round of tariff reductions, or Dr Kissinger's dilemma (if it exists) in deciding between the White House and Harvard comes closer to "*Nature's* parish" than "The Vietnam war as such". Where, one wonders, can one find a reader of *Nature* who would not see more pertinence in questions such as "the long-term effects of the bombing, the use of CS and of herbicides and other methods of defoliation, both on the people and the ecology of Vietnam" which the AAAS now wants the National Academy of Sciences to investigate (see page 7 of the same issue)? For that matter, the lovers of nature I know would even take an interest in the short-term effects.

Secondly, where can we find the European statesman whom the "irrationality of the bombing over Christmas" has so boosted morally speaking that he felt free "to talk as an equal to the United States"? He seems spectacularly absent in the major European countries (England no exception), whereas Palme of Sweden and Jørgensen of Denmark have a prior record of not having needed that boost.

Thirdly, who among suffering mankind, other than Dr Kissinger himself, are you now prepared to take in as your parishioners?

Yours faithfully,

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