Committee on Chemicals, Oil and Gas from Coal

In the House of Commons on April 16, Mr. J. C. George asked the Paymaster-General what further action the Government proposed to take to investigate possible methods of converting coal into chemicals, gas and oil. Sir Ian Horobin, in a written answer, stated that the Minister of Power has decided, after consultation with Sir Alexander Fleck, chairman of the Scientific Advisory Council, to set up a committee with the following terms of reference: "To review the work that has been done in recent years on the development of processes in which coal is the basic raw material and which will produce marketable products of a chemical or a gaseous or liquid hydrocarbon type; and to make recommendations as to the direction of further research and development work on any such processes which appear to the committee to hold promise of industrial application and as to the type of organization or organizations best suited to carry out such work".

The members of the committee will be: *Chairman*, Mr. A. H. Wilson (managing director in charge of research and development, Courtaulds, Ltd.); *Secretary*, Mr. W. R. G. Bell (Ministry of Power); Mr. M. A. L. Banks (director, B.P. Trading, Ltd.); Mr. Henry Benson (Cooper Brothers and Co.); Mr. H. E. Collins (National Coal Board); Capt. (E) W. Gregson (chairman, Fuel Efficiency Advisory Committee); Dr. R. Holroyd (director, Imperial Chemical Industries, Ltd.); Mr. W. K. Hutchison (chairman, South Eastern Gas Board); Dr. M. A. Matthews (Shell International Chemical Co., Ltd.); Mr. B. E. A. Vigers (Laporte Industries, Ltd.). The committee will be assisted in its work by two assessors: Mr. A. W. Clarke (director, Warren Spring Laboratory of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research); and Mr. D. A. B. Llewellyn (Ministry of Power).

Manufacture of Polypropylene in Britain

An agreement has been signed whereby Imperial Chemical Industries, Ltd., acquires a licence under the Montecatini and Montecatini/Ziegler U.K. patents covering the production and use of a new polypropylene plastic, originally discovered by Prof. Natta. A new plant to manufacture this plastic ('Propathene') is being constructed at the Wilton Works in North Yorkshire. It is expected to bring the total capacity of Imperial Chemical Industries for polyolefines for 'Alkathene' and 'Propathene' to more than 100,000 tons a year. 'Propathene' is being manufactured at a pilot plant, and arrangements have been made to augment this pilot plant production so that the material will be available commercially from June 1. 'Propathene' is particularly suitable for moulding uses in view of its high rigidity and resistance to temperature. It is also expected to find extensive use in film form and as a general extrusion material.

First Hungarian Atomic Reactor

Hungary's first experimental atomic reactor, which began working on March 25, is a small reactor, of 2 MW. capacity, situated in the Buda Mountains above Budapest. The installation is fully automatic. The Soviet Union supplied plans and a large part of the installation, five Hungarian institutes drew up the final designs and thirty Hungarian establishments took part in the construction of the reactor. It is primarily for research work, and particularly for the training of nuclear technicians. Neutrons obtained from the reactor will be used for experimental examination of the structure of the atomic nucleus, and isotopes will be supplied to industrial, medical and scientific establishments in Hungary. Previously, radioactive isotopes required for therapeutic purposes have been obtained abroad, and short-lived isotopes required for biological experiments could not be obtained at all. The reactor will solve both these problems. Experience gained from the new reactor will be used in the future planning and construction of atomic power stations in Hungary.

The National Engineering Laboratory

The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research has announced that in future the Mechanical Engineering Research Laboratory at East Kilbride, near Glasgow, will be known as the National Engineering Laboratory. This is considered desirable in order to emphasize the national character of the Laboratory, which is part of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research organization and is financed from public funds: it does not imply any change in the field covered by the Laboratory. A Steering Committee has been set up to look after the programme of the Laboratory, the object of which is to extend knowledge of mechanical engineering science so as to provide industry with the information it requires for the solution of its own particular problems. In order therefore that its work may be focused on practical objectives of real value to industry (which may involve basic or applied research or, in suitable cases, development work), it has been decided that the planning of the Laboratory's activities and the selection of research projects can best be under the control of a small body with a measure of executive authority. The Committee's terms of reference are: (1) to be responsible to the Research Council for the selection of projects and for the allocation of effort to them, within the financial resources allocated to the Laboratory and such other limits as may from time to time be imposed by the Council; (2) to report annually to Council, submitting a research programme for the following year. The Committee, which will be a full committee of the Research Council, is empowered to set up specialist sub-committees to provide technical advice on particular fields of work.

The new Steering Committee will be under the chairmanship of Vice-Admiral Sir Frank Mason, (director of Metal Industries, Ltd., and of H. W. Kearns and Co., Ltd.), who is a member of the Research Council and chairman of the outgoing Mechanical Engineering Research Board. The members of the Committee will be Prof. O. A. Saunders (Imperial College of Science and Technology, London), Norman Elce (director of Metropolitan-Vickers Electrical Co., Ltd.), Dr. D. G. Sopwith (director of the Mechanical Engineering Research Laboratory), Dr. C. M. Cawley (director of Stations and Grants Divisions of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research). In order to assist the Director as the Laboratory expands and to improve and extend the links between the Laboratory and industry, two deputy directors have been appointed. They are Dr. S. P. Hutton and Mr. F. D. Penny. Dr. Hutton, who is at present head of the Fluid Mechanics Division of the Mechanical Engineering Research Laboratory, will have special responsibilities for fostering closer relationships with industry. Mr. Penny, who is chief development engineer at the Fuel Research Station, will be responsible for the management of the research programme.