

EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN BRITAIN

THE debate on educational policy in the House of Lords on July 24, which was opened by the Earl of Longford, brought a spirited defence of Government policy from Lord Newton, but added substantially little to the present debate. The Earl of Longford had pointed out that the cost of education had risen from £414 million in 1951-52 to nearly £1,250 million in 1963-64, and in the same period the percentage of the national income spent on education had increased from about 3.1 to 4.9. He agreed with Sir Edward Boyle's assumption that the reserve of potential ability among young people was not tapped to anything like the full extent. Lord Newton quoted also the view expressed by Sir Edward at Belfast on July 5 that if children were separated at any stage it should be done in their interests, and not because it pleased their parents or because of any social, class or colour distinction. We should work towards a situation in which every child had an equal chance of developing its interests and personality to the full. Defending the Government's impartiality regarding any particular pattern of secondary school organization, Lord Newton thought also that the achievements in school building had been considerable in terms alike of quantity and of economy and quality. This was due particularly to the work of the development group in the Ministry of Education, whose efforts now provided new schools at a cost, at constant prices, little more than half that in 1949. Lord Newton also referred to the need to re-examine many traditional assumptions and practices about the organization of schools in Britain. Sir Edward Boyle at Belfast had suggested that there might be room for more flexibility in the size of the groups to be taught, that we should ask what were the limits of an acceptable balance between men and women in the different stages of the schools system, what were the true functions of a highly trained teacher and whether their skills and experience were at present being dissipated in tasks which might well be delegated to other hands. All these questions, Lord Newton observed, required discussion, and, while in the recruitment of part-time teachers much of the initiative must rest with the schools and the local education authorities, the Government could help, particularly by commissioning research into the obstacles to be over-

come and into the most fruitful lines of development. To reduce all classes to 30 or less would require a further 110,000 teachers, while the decision taken in January to increase the capacity of the training colleges to 80,000 students by 1970 would only give a net addition of 5,000 teachers during the decade.

In a maiden speech, Viscount Samuel, directing attention to the possibility of technological unemployment as the result of automation in industry, stressed the urgency of raising the minimum school-leaving age and referred also to its bearing on the wise use of leisure. Apart from Lord Taylor, speakers in the debate made little reference to the universities, but Lord James of Rusholme stressed the urgency of expansion and thought that the target of 170,000 students by the early 1970's was neither large enough nor likely to be reached without a new sense of urgency. He thought that the universities should see themselves as one end of a spectrum of higher education, distinguished from the others by the relative difficulty and originality of the ideas discussed and evaluated within their walls. He had few misgivings about standards, but some about the possible loss of liberty. While he himself regarded the Ministry of Education as a friend and an enlightened counsellor, it was vital that whatever administrative changes were made the essential liberties of institutions of higher learning should be defined by those who value them, and respected by those who administer them. The liberties to think, to speak, to publish the truth as one sees it; to decide what are the standards to be maintained and the studies to be pursued; to follow the argument where it leads—these are the essentials of teaching and research at the highest level, and on their preservation depends the quality of higher education.

In replying on the debate for the Government, the Earl of Dundee made no comment on Lord Taylor's suggestion that the Ministry of Education should take over from the Treasury its responsibilities for university education, but pointed out that by 1966-67 besides 150,000 students at universities there would be 137,000 students at teacher training colleges, colleges of advanced technology and other advanced technical colleges, or 10 per cent of the relevant age group, and a good deal higher in 1970.

RESEARCH INTO STRATEGIC TRANSPORT PLANNING

IN replying for the Government in a debate on the needs of transport for research in the House of Commons on July 30, which was opened by Mr. W. T. Rodgers, who asked specifically about economic studies, the encouragement given to postgraduate training, and research into strategic transport planning, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Transport, Mr. T. G. D. Galbraith, said that the aim in the Ministry should be to keep a balance between action and research. Sometimes only when dealing with a problem in practice could one see where the difficulties lay, what additional information would be helpful, and where more research was needed. In transport, research was best concentrated, therefore, so as to help the solution of actual problems of policy and planning. This was recognized in the Hall Report, which gave the general outlook for traffic in 1981, and began with a statement of the fundamental problems confronting the Ministry before discussing possible lines of research. In transport in cities, for example, the difficulty was to obtain a solution which gave the right

balance between conflicting interests. To do so it was necessary to discover the future pattern of personal travel, the strength of preferences for different patterns of travel, the future needs for the movement of goods, the pattern of transport facilities to-day, and the costs of adding to them in various ways, etc. Even with all the facts from such a survey, techniques of handling this knowledge were required and over the whole range of transport there were in fact two stages: research to discover the facts, and research to enable the right lessons to be drawn from them.

The Hall Report and the Beeching Report (see *Nature*, 198, 1233; 1963) were two examples of research which had been proceeding to obtain the facts; on the urban side, the Buchanan Report would soon be available, with its wide implications for city life, and the Ministry and the London County Council had jointly commissioned the London Traffic Survey, which would give detailed information of future traffic needs to enable these to be related to changes in employment, residential patterns, etc. The