

SCIENCE IN PARLIAMENT

Manpower

TWO short debates in the House of Commons on February 5 were concerned with manpower. The first, opened by Dr. W. Davies, dealt more particularly with the Youth Employment Service. Dr. Davies welcomed a suggested enquiry into the possibilities of further co-operation with the school medical service and a more detailed investigation of major defects of health on employment below the age of twenty-five. He also welcomed the two postgraduate courses for school counsellors to start this year at the University of Keele and the University of Reading, and the establishment of a Vocational Guidance Research Unit at the University of Leeds, with support from the Department of Industrial and Scientific Research. While the earlier speeches were constructive, they dealt with apprenticeship, rather than with training within industry, as the Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Labour, Mr. R. Marsh, pointed out, and this was largely a matter for industry itself, in which the industrial training boards set up under the Industrial Training Act would help. At present the Ministry was providing pilot courses for training about 700 first-year apprentices. He agreed as to the importance of career prospects for youth employment officers. At present about 37 per cent of local authority employment officers were in a salary range of £1,100-£1,500 and there were also about 100 chief officers in the range £1,500-£2,500 or more, while officers employed by the Ministry had the same scope as other Civil Servants. The respective roles of the youth employment officer and the careers master required careful examination even when a school had a well-developed careers service: the relation of the service with employers equally required consideration. Mr. Marsh said the Minister had referred the whole question of handicaps in physical health to a special sub-committee of the Industrial Health Advisory Service. As regards employment, the service had found jobs by December for all but 1,426 of the 446,155 students who left school in the summer of 1964, but in January 1965 there were 23,000 young people unemployed, compared with 32,000 in January 1964; unemployment among young people was serious in the North-east, Scotland, Wales and Merseyside. Since 1956 the number of youth employment officers had risen from 900 to more than 1,500, and more than half the officers had case loads of 500 or less, compared with two-thirds with loads of more than 600 two years ago. Subsequent speakers urged the need for more co-operation between the Ministry of Labour and the Department of Education and Science, for a careers research unit, for more flexibility and, as in the following debate on skilled manpower, for more efficient use of trained manpower.

The second debate was opened by Mr. B. Ford and Mr. N. Ridley, and, in replying, the Minister of Labour, Mr. R. J. Gunter, welcomed the debate, and referred to the investigations of the Ministry's Manpower Research Unit which were expected to throw light on the changing requirements for skilled men of several industries selected for their susceptibility to technological change as well as for their importance in the economy. An examination of the metal-manufacturing and metal-using industries would be published shortly. The five industrial training boards already established—for engineering, construction, iron and steel, wool, and shipbuilding—would be raising their first levies in 1965 and paying grants to firms carrying out training, while the Government training centres were well adapted both to provide a rapid increase in skilled labour where it was most urgently needed, and to enable

men who had missed training, or whose skill had become out-dated, quickly to acquire a skill in demand. There were now 26 centres, compared with 13 with a capacity of less than 2,500 in 1963, and by the end of the year there would be 30 with a capacity of 6,000. Britain would then be training up to 12,000 men a year, and Mr. Gunter said he was considering with greater urgency what further expansion was required. He had already decided to establish new centres in the Plymouth and Medway towns areas. He estimated that a saving of 10-15 per cent in manpower could be achieved by the more efficient use of skilled manpower, and welcomed what had been said on this both by Mr. Ford and Mr. Ridley, as well as Mr. Ford's appeal to the Trade Unions for a more enlightened approach and a reform of Trade Union structures. Finally, Mr. Gunter stressed the vital importance of an enlightened and generous approach to the whole question of redundancy if we were to remove the greatest obstacle to change—the fear of a reduction in standards of living and of moving homes.

The Gas Bill

The Gas Bill, which had an unopposed second reading in the House of Commons on February 11, is intended to assist the modernization of that industry by providing an organization which will enable the industry to take full advantage of the numerous recent technological changes and developments and also to make use of underground storage, which is being widely used elsewhere but has not so far been developed in Britain. In moving the second reading, Mr. F. Lee, the Minister of Power, said that the Bill was based on the recommendations of the Select Committee of the Nationalized Industries. This Committee, in a report on the gas industry nearly four years ago, had suggested that technologically the emphasis should now be on the interdependence of the area boards, and not on their independence, as envisaged in the Gas Act of 1948. The Committee considered that the present structure of the industry was unsuited for the development of large-scale production and distribution facilities on a national basis, and both the present and the previous Government agreed with this view, and considered that, of the two alternatives suggested by the Select Committee, extension of the powers of the Gas Council would best meet the situation. The aim was to provide a structure which would enable the industry to select whatever method was most advantageous to the users of gas, and the Government believed that this would best be achieved, with the minimum change in the present structure, by giving a strengthened Gas Council powers complementing those of the area boards and a general responsibility for promoting co-ordinated development of gas supplies. The Select Committee had also directed attention to the potential importance of underground storage of gas in natural porous strata as a particular example of the way in which new techniques could improve the economics of gas supply on a scale larger than that required for the needs of individual boards, and the need for new statutory powers for such a development. Mr. Lee said that the previous Government had also intended to provide legislation for this purpose, and the present Bill was intended to facilitate the development where it was safe and advantageous, providing a system of control and supervision which would ensure that underground storage was only developed and operated in conditions involving no risk of danger to people, property or water resources.

Clause 1 of Part 1 of the Bill, Mr. Lee explained, empowered the Gas Council to manufacture, acquire and