The examiners are much more sure of themselves on the machinery of the administration of science. From what they have to say, there are obviously great advantages in the existence of the Delegation-General for scientific research—a permanent secretariat serving both the ministerial committee responsible for major policy decisions (and for the final allocation of the budget) and the advisory committee of scientists responsible for making recommendations on these matters. The size and competence of the secretariat are obviously the chief reasons why it has been possible to sustain such a rapid rate of growth of science in France in recent years without too much absurdity. Yet even so, it has not been possible to iron out all the awkward ups and downs in the scale of financial support. Worse still, the consultative machinery seems to have worked less effectively than the examiners would have wished, so that major decisions have been made on grounds which are too exclusively political.

The essential difficulty is the conflict of interest there is almost certain to be between a nation and the scientific community embedded within it. The objectives of the two entities do not necessarily coincide. The extent to which the United States and the United Kingdom were committed to defence research and development in the decade after the war, inevitable though it may have been, often created a fearful unbalance of the pattern of scientific work. (It is to be hoped that the Government of France will not now feel it necessary to mimic the full extent of this pattern; the OECD examiners were alarmed by some of the signs they thought they could discern.) More recently, the space programme in the United States has not been precisely what scientists themselves, with the interests of their craft in mind, would have dictated. But to ask that the efforts of scientists should be deployed only in ways that suit scientists themselves is to ask too much. It is, of course, entirely respectable that the efforts of scientists should be consciously directed at practical objectives. But is it, then, that the relationship between a nation and its scientists should be like its relationship with its armed services? Is it for society to decide what science should attempt, and for scientists to do society's bidding? This thin analogy seems to lie behind some of the machinery for making decisions in France—and elsewhere. But this, too, is an untenable extreme. One difficulty is that objectives defined from outside may prove to be unattainable. More serious, there is the real danger that objectives which are too rigid or too unreal may rob science of its own self-generating intellectual excitement which, in the last resort, is its only stock in trade. Finally, this same excitement is itself a help in defining realizable and valid objectives. All of this argues in favour of a much better balance—in France and elsewhere—between the interests of governments and scientists in the definition of objectives. Most probably, no system of committees will ever be sufficient. The real need is for some much more vigorous involvement of working scientists in the definition of what their work is for.

NEWS AND VIEWS

Home for Microscopes

THE Royal Microscopical Society is one of the most vigorous of the learned societies in Britain. Far from being a kind of club for those concerned with the technology of building microscopes, it has a catholic interest in all those fields of science in which the micron and the ångström are in common usage. It is therefore sad to see the society having to hunt around for a permanent headquarters outside London. The rent of the present offices in Tavistock Square is being enormously increased according to Dr. John Baker, chairman of the society's council, who feels that the society cannot afford to remain in London. He would like to see the society move to another town, probably close to a university, where it could house its offices, microscope collection and laboratories for its courses in optical microscopy. The monthly meetings would still be held in London.

While the council can make no definite plans until a decision is made by the members, they are investigating various sites. One possible site in Oxford was turned down by the City Council because the city wanted the site, but Dr. Baker stated that Oxford is still very much a possibility. Wherever the society decides to go they will certainly be welcomed, but this hunt for living space may be regarded by some as yet another sign of the need for a more generous provision of board and lodging for British societies.

Atomic Agriculture

THE International Atomic Energy Agency of the United Nations is giving Yugoslavia more than 600,000 dollars worth of equipment for research at the Zemun Institute for the Application of Nuclear Energy in Agriculture, Veterinary Medicine and Forestry. The Yugoslav government has contributed about two million dollars worth of buildings, equipment, training and general expenses to make the institute the centre of agricultural research in the country. During the last three years the United Nations Development Programme, with the IAEA acting as the executive agency, has cooperated with the Yugoslav Federal Nuclear Energy Commission in one of the programme's biggest single projects for applied research and training. With this combined support, the institute has undertaken extensive studies of soil fertility and plant nutrition, use of ionizing radiations to produce mutants for plant breeding, and animal nutrition and health protection.

American Rock Names

THAT much has flowed down the geological rivers of North America since 1936 is plainly obvious from the latest milestone in publications from the U.S. Geological Survey. The three volumed *Lexicon of Geological Names of the United States for 1936–1960* (*U.S.G.S. Bulletin 1200*, Washington, D.C., 1966. $13) is the sixth such compilation to come from the Survey since F. B. Weeks's *North American Geologic Formation Names* was published in 1902.