

haps they are hoping that the precedent set by the House of Lords in the debate on Ullswater may be followed; on that occasion the advocacy of Lord Birkett turned back the Bill that would have enabled Manchester to use Ullswater as a reservoir.

In this case the arguments will have to be different; the threat to Ullswater concerned the general public, but that to Upper Teesdale is a matter for botanists and ecologists, who claim that the valley contains a unique series of plant communities which have survived virtually unchanged since the last Ice Age. Flowers which grow there include the spring gentian, the birds-eye primrose, the Teesdale violet and—rarest of all—the spring sandwort (*Minuartia stricta*) which is found nowhere else in Britain. These flowers grow in Upper Teesdale because of a combination of geological and soil factors which has produced on a small scale a habitat in which they can survive—a habitat which the opponents of the Bill believe to be so fragile that any change will destroy it. At a meeting organized by the Teesdale Defence Committee in London last week, Dr. Max Walters, curator of the Herbarium at Cambridge University, said that “In terms of pure botanical science alone, Upper Teesdale has revealed its secrets in an impressive way, especially during the last decade as a result of the use of new techniques and new avenues of approach. To destroy this open-air laboratory for short-term economic gains should be as unthinkable to the nation as would be a similar sacrifice of Westminster Abbey or Ely Cathedral”.

Meanwhile, the Tees Valley and Cleveland Water Board, prompted and encouraged by I.C.I., Ltd., must find a site for a new reservoir if the needs of industry on Tees-side are to be met. So much is agreed. Seventeen sites in the area were examined, and finally the site at Cow Green was selected. This is not the area of greatest botanical interest, which is on Widdy-bank and Cronkley Fells, but the Water Board admits that 17 acres which the botanists wish to preserve would be submerged. Ecologists are divided about the effect this would have on the plant habitats, but it is possible that the ecology would be affected over an area much greater than the 17 acres submerged.

There is at least one consolation for the Defence Committee. If they win their battle in the House of Lords, the decision is likely to be final. It is improbable that the Minister would make an order allowing modified plans to go forward, as with Ullswater.

Stronger Vice-Chancellors ?

THE Committee of Vice-Chancellors, the only organization which represents the interests of all British universities, is taking steps to strengthen its organization. It is understood that the committee has now circulated to the universities a notice of its intention to reorganize and develop its activities so as to become more effective in presenting the views and interest of the universities. In its dealings with the universities, the Vice-Chancellors' Committee has made it plain that it does not wish to transform itself without approval. Given the agreement of the universities, however, it seems to be acknowledged that there will have to be a larger professional staff to support the work of the voluntary committees responsible for making decisions.

The reasons the committee has given for its wish to create a more effective organization are the problems

arising from the growth of the system of higher education, which require that universities should be able to make quick and central decisions on matters of common interest. The committee has also said that it would be an advantage if universities were more able to make their common views known to the Government and the public.

The main object of the new machinery would be to sustain a continuing review of all university matters, and to carry out the *ad hoc* studies which are increasingly necessary for the efficient management of the system of higher education. The committee has recently begun some projects of this kind, but obviously there is a lot more to be done. What seems now to be in prospect is that the Committee of Vice-Chancellors will grow into a kind of central intelligence unit for the university system as a whole. This, the argument goes, is the best means of defence against pressures from outside.

Defence of Agriculture

THE increasingly stringent tests being applied by British Government departments to proposals for spending money on research have prompted the Agricultural Research Council, in its annual report for 1965-66 (H.M.S.O., 7s. 6d.), to list some of the benefits which British agriculture now enjoys from its expenditure on research. Taking as its text the sentence in the recent report of the Advisory Council for Scientific Policy which said that the chances of obtaining funds will be improved “if the nation as a whole has a full understanding of the kinds of pay-off which are to be expected”, the council points to the way in which British agricultural production has increased by no less than 44 per cent in the past decade, or by the equivalent of £274 millions a year. Without seeking to claim credit for the whole of this improvement, the council does consider that its work has helped in several ways, and particularly by the breeding of animals and plants with improved performance, improvements of husbandry, the introduction of better feeding practices and means of controlling diseases and pests, and improvements of harvesting techniques.

The council has tried to put a figure to the value of some of its achievements. Thus the 24 per cent increase in the yield of barley in the past decade, worth £30 millions a year in cash, is attributed to the use of weed killers and better strains of plants, particularly the variety called *Proctor*. Even allowing for the cost of extra fertilizers, the net value of the improvement worked out at £17 millions a year. The report goes on to record that £4 millions a year would be saved if only the manuring practices worked out at Rothamsted were properly applied to the treatment of cereals, and that another £200,000 is being saved by the control of milk fever in dairy cattle. Fuller use of crossbred breeding sows could increase the production of piglets in Britain by 400,000 a year, which would be worth £1.5 millions. The Agricultural Research Council's recitation of these and other good works is modest enough, and indeed the council “claims no monopoly” in agricultural research. It does, however, reaffirm its view that agricultural research must be a closely integrated service, for then the significance of research “is more quickly perceived and exploited, without any detriment to the extent or value of the contributions that are made to science as a whole”.