

up to 1.4μ thick can be examined, and the instrument already has one triumph behind it—the identification of an alloy inclusion which would have fallen out if conventional thinning techniques had been needed. AEI is confident that a number of 1 MV microscopes can be sold, and has orders from the National Physical Laboratory, the Atomic Energy Authority at Harwell, and the Science Research Council. Deliveries will start in two years time, which gives some Japanese companies a substantial lead—they are already marketing 500 kV and 1 MV instruments. In France and the United States the talk is now in terms of 3 MV and 5 MV instruments.

Select Committee

THE Select Committee on Science and Technology continued its search for something to be shocked about when it discussed the British nuclear reactor programme with a delegation from the Central Electricity Generating Board on March 16. In earlier discussions, Sir William Penney had suggested that substantial savings could be made by using standardized designs, but Mr. F. H. S. Brown, chairman of the CEBG, did not agree. He thinks that greater savings can be made by technological development than are possible by replication of design. While standardization could doubtless give a price reduction of 7–10 per cent, development had brought down the cost of reactors from £180 a kW for the "Magnox" reactor to £100 a kW for the Advanced Gas Cooled reactor. Standardization in the United States, Mr. Brown believes, has only been possible because water moderated reactors are at the end of their development. To give up development of the AGR for the sake of marginal cost reductions would be foolish.

Mr. Brown went on to give the committee the following comparison of the costs of two AGR power stations and one new coal fired power station.

	Capital costs (per kW)	Running costs (d/kWh)
Dungeness B	£104.8	0.511
Hinkley Point B	£95.5	0.476
Drax (coal fired)	£55.2	0.577

During its proceedings last week the committee did finally sight a hare to chase. Apparently the capital expenditure of the CEBG for the financial year that begins at the end of March has not yet been approved by the Ministry of Power. Some members of the committee were clearly taken aback although the CEBG patiently explained that it would make very little difference as long as capital projects already under way would not have to be brought to a shuddering halt. This had not happened, although the start of the Hinkley Point B station had had to be delayed by 12 months, and the CEBG would therefore have to wait another year before reaping the economic advantages of the new station. As for natural gas, the men from the electricity industry would not be drawn—they would, of course, be well placed to use the gas for electricity generation, but all depended on the price fixed for the gas. Was the Ministry of Power influenced by greedy thoughts of what natural gas could do for British power generation? Did this make it reluctant to approve new expenditure on nuclear plant? On their best behaviour, the CEBG delegation refused to guess.

Parliament in Britain

REPLYING to a request for a statement on the future of the National Reference Library of Science and Invention, the Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science, Miss Jennie Lee, said in the House of Commons on March 13 that the provision of a new building was a matter for the Minister of Public Building and Works. A working party representing the British Museum, the Treasury, the Ministry of Public Building and Works and the Department of Education and Science was reviewing the space required. The 1966 report of the Trustees of the British Museum revealed encouraging progress in staffing, acquisitions, physical reconstruction and improvement, and the next few years should see considerable further developments.

IN a written answer in the House of Commons on March 14, the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs, Mr. H. Bowden, stated that the Government had under consideration the recommendation of the mission under the chairmanship of Sir Charles Morris (now Lord) that a comprehensive university institution to serve the needs of the English speaking territories in the South Pacific area should be established at Laucala Bay, Fiji. Mr. Bowden said that the British Government would be prepared to offer, subject to approval of Parliament, £1.25 million sterling over some 5 years towards the initial cost of the university, including related institutes, of which up to £500,000 could, if necessary, be devoted to recurrent costs. The provision of assistance is subject to a firm decision by the Fiji Government, after such consultation as it may find necessary with other governments in the area, to proceed with the establishment of the university. The New Zealand Government has already promised help.

ON March 15 the Postmaster General, Mr. E. Short, told the House of Commons that in the past year the Post Office had earned 7.8 per cent overall on capital compared with a target of 8 per cent and the predicted return for 1967–68 was 7.4 per cent. Over the whole five year period it was anticipated the return on the postal side would be short of the target, but not on the telecommunications side. Much postal work offered little or no scope for increased mechanization, about 40 per cent of postal costs being incurred in collecting and delivering mail, and the profit of £4 million this year was made on an income and expenditure of about £340 million. Subscriber trunk dialling (STD) was now available on about three-quarters of the telephones in Britain and by the end of 1967 fewer than 3 per cent of subscribers would be connected to manual exchanges, There would be none after 1970–71.

MR. SHORT said that the number of staff trained in the latest management techniques of work study and operational research was being increased; about £4 million worth of computers were already installed and working; others to the value of £3 million were on order, and by 1971, 20 large computers would be in operation. It was expected that in about 2 years time use of computers in telephone accounting would save over 2,500 clerical staff, and in posts and telecommunications was expected to save over 12,000 staff in the next few years.