

doctors, the pregnancy endangers the life, health or well-being, whether physical or mental, of a pregnant woman, taking account of the patient's total environment. Other grounds for abortion in the Bill are substantial risk of deformity in the child, severe overstrain of the pregnant woman's capacity as a mother, and her mental deficiency, or pregnancy as a result of rape.

A number of medical organizations raised various doubts about the Bill in its original form. The British Medical Association objected to the use of the word "serious" to qualify the risk to life and of "grave" qualifying the injury to health in the original form of the Bill. Both these words could provide lawyers with talking points and lead to unforeseen interpretations. These objections were accepted by the sponsors of the Bill, who also inserted the phrase "account may be taken of the patient's total environment, actual or reasonably foreseeable". The BMA also wanted to alter some of the clauses relating to the method of notification of abortions, but the sponsors of the Bill have not taken these into account as yet. Doctors themselves are not entirely happy that the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists is pressing for abortions to be carried out only by consultant gynaecologists. The BMA does not entirely agree with the RCOG because there are parts of Britain where consultant gynaecologists are not readily available, but it does want the operation to be performed by a consultant, or a doctor of equivalent status.

Most of the concern about the present form of the Bill centres around the "doctor's dilemma" that it might introduce. It is thought in many quarters that the Bill as it stands asks doctors to decide whether or not to abort using criteria that fall outside their special competence. This is the case when they are asked to consider the woman's "capacity as a mother" apart from her life and health. In practice these clauses may prove difficult if not impossible to put into effect, and as has been pointed out the ethical, not to speak of the legal, problems that could arise might well be considerable. Other doctors think that their role is to decide on social questions as well as on purely "medical" matters, but there is clearly considerable disagreement in the profession. One obvious pitfall to avoid is that which the Swedish law on abortion has fallen into—there the process of obtaining an abortion is so wrapped up in red tape that pregnancy is frequently well advanced before a potential mother can get permission. Difficulties like these are probably unavoidable as long as decision making rests with society and not the pregnant woman.

Ministry Magazine

As if to celebrate the bloodless take-over of the Ministry of Aviation, the Ministry of Technology has produced the first issue of a new publication. Called *New Technology*, the magazine is intended to reach a monthly circulation of 100,000, and will be sent out free to industrialists, technologists and other interested parties. Launching the new magazine, which will cost the ministry £22,000 per year, Minister of Technology Anthony Wedgwood Benn said that it was hoped to improve communications between the ministry and those on whom its work impinges. It in

no way implied a criticism of the existing technical press, he said, and they might be happy to use it as a press service. Those interested in receiving the magazine should apply to the Central Office of Information.

The minister also spoke of the need to focus the attention of the universities on to industrial problems. This could be done through the institutes of advanced technology which were being set up in the universities; the first, in machine tool technology, is at the University of Strathclyde. Another is expected to be established quite soon, but it is not yet known where it will be.

Civil Service Promotions

THIS is the season at which the procedure in the British civil service for deciding which scientists should receive special merit promotions gets under way. Very soon, directors of establishments will be invited to recommend the names of those senior people likely to be successful candidates for special promotion. Later in the year names will be sifted by government departments and their chief scientists and by the Civil Service Commission. Eventually a short list of candidates will be interviewed by a panel under Sir Frederick Brundrett and with members from outside the civil service. Twenty or thirty people will be promoted to a higher grade on the strength of their scientific attainments and in the hope that they will continue creative work within the public service. This year this procedure is likely to be looked at with especial care because the Fulton Commission on the civil service is bound among other things to be concerned with the way in which scientists function in public life.

This special merit promotion scheme in the British civil service goes back to 1947 and is a consequence of the Barlow Report on the civil service. At that point it was recognized by the Treasury to be imprudent that scientists could be promoted only by being shouldered with the extra administrative responsibility normally associated with higher rank. Merit promotions can now be awarded to civil servants with the rank of principal scientific officer and above, and the men and women concerned are carried on the books of the establishments outside the normal complement agreed with the Treasury. In practice, those who hold special merit promotions are expected to continue actively with scientific work, and indeed the Civil Service Commission takes care to see, by means of a review every five years, that establishments do not use the device as a means of increasing the number of senior administrators on their books.

Over the past two decades, something like a score of scientific civil servants a year have been awarded special promotions. More recently, other governmental organizations not strictly within the civil service, such as the Agricultural Research Council, the Atomic Energy Authority and (now) the General Post Office, have been included in the scheme, so that the number of special promotions has increased to something like thirty a year. Surprisingly there seems to be no danger that the promotions will be institutionalized and made to seem to civil servants as automatic accolades for senior people. At least a part of the explanation is the care with which candi-