

less relevant than it might have been because it has too rigidly discounted the importance of classical economics. And then, it is only a decade since it was conventionally proper in Britain to suppose that a rapid increase in the output of graduates in the sciences from British universities was the only assurance of national prosperity. In the long run, the investment then made in university teaching will certainly prove to be worthwhile, but the British Government is probably sorry that it did not make a greater fuss on behalf of engineers. And in any case, for reasons which are primarily economic, the country does not make such a vigorous demand on the services of its technical people as to prevent them emigrating abroad.

But surely this is well understood? That, at least, must be the hope. If, as Sir Peter Medawar said last week, the Science of Science Foundation is really concerned to see that science is "integrated in society", it will be on the side of the angels. As yet, of course, there has not been time for it to show how forceful it can be in this direction. Indeed, its entirely valuable work of organizing symposia of important problems has occasionally been marred by the attempts of outsiders to demonstrate that the science of science is so coherent a subject that it can be dignified as a kind of academic discipline. Even the foundation's public speakers have not always been free from obscurantism like this.

How does this accord with the foundation's view of its own future? The first thing to be said is that it is entirely commendable that the foundation should now wish to settle down, with permanent offices of its own and a staff which can work hard without having to worry too much about making ends meet. Ideally, the foundation should become something in between a learned society and a source of public (and professional) enlightenment. The closest parallel is the Institute of Strategic Studies, which has become in just a decade an internationally influential body of opinion, respected and creative. Obviously there is a great deal which could be done by a similar body with a special interest in science and technology. This is one of the targets which the Science of Science Foundation has chosen for itself. It will be interesting to see whether it is attainable.

But the foundation also has it in mind to become a sponsor of research at universities and elsewhere. This is a more risky and a more dubious undertaking. British universities are at present building up a good relationship with the Social Sciences Research Council. Good ideas and trained people are more scarce than funds. It remains to be seen just what advantages the Science of Science Foundation has to offer in this field. Certainly, when everything is so new, it is hard to believe that the universities and the research councils would welcome a transfer of grant-giving functions to some third party. To begin with, at least, the foundation might be more valuable in seeking to stimulate universities and others. Certainly it will have to win their sympathy if it is to become an important broker for research grants. But in any case, the quasi-judicial

function of deciding who should get money for what may not be entirely compatible with the freedom to be openly persuasive, which should be the foundation's most cherished ambition.

DECIMAL BY DECREE

THE British Government seems to be entirely set in its determination that the United Kingdom shall be blessed only with an approximation to a decimal coinage in February 1971. Although the debate in the House of Commons on March 19 was followed by all kinds of rumours that repentance—or half-repentance—was not entirely impossible, there is nothing to suggest that these reflect anything but the disbelief among the critics of the Government that reason can be totally ineffectual. Briefly, the Treasury has settled for the majority recommendation of the Halsbury Committee, and is proposing to introduce a decimal coinage based on the pound sterling (identical in value with that now current), fractions which amount in value to 1 per cent of a pound (but which are called pennies, not cents) and coins which will be known as half-pence. It seems to be agreed that the new system will not conform as easily with that now in use as some other means of making decimals would have done. The Halsbury Committee asked that considerations such as these should be balanced against the traditional familiarity of the pound sterling, and it was understandable that historical considerations should have been given more weight four years ago than they are given now. There is, however, nothing in the Government's attitude towards decimals that would suggest a careful balancing of arguments like these against each other. On the contrary, it has all the appearance of knowing its own strength and of taking a secret pleasure in its capacity to ignore reasonable criticism.

The case against the Government's proposals now turns on the hybrid character of the new coinage, the poor associability of the new system with the old, and the fact that the smallest coin in the new system will be much larger than would be convenient. The argument about the size of the smallest coin has been particularly prominent in recent weeks. The difficulty, of course, is that none of these arguments is really quantified. The British Treasury has been able to meet all kinds of criticisms with the simple riposte that its own judgment runs the other way. But these are not matters to be decided only by qualitative declarations. The choice of a new coinage is similar in kind but much more important than the choice of the colour to be used in road traffic signs, for example, or the choice of dimensions for aircraft seats. In this sense the chief complaint against the Government is not that it has denied its own supporters in the House of Commons the right to vote freely on decimals, but that it has made a political issue of a matter which has nothing at all to do with politics but with social science.