

NEWS AND VIEWS

AEC in Plenty

THE programme of the US Atomic Energy Commission for the new fiscal year has received its customary and predictable blessing from the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. In the committee's report to Congress, based on a series of hearings which began at the end of January and lasted for seven weeks, the committee has suggested some modest additions to the AEC's own version of its operating budget and has pared some \$7 million from the request for capital funds in the year ahead. If the committee has its way, and there is hardly any chance that it will fail to do so, the AEC will have a total of \$2,634 million to spend, \$2,165 million of it on operating expenses.

Both the Joint Committee and the AEC seem cheerful about the development of civil nuclear power in the United States. The committee is proposing that the AEC should have \$484 million to spend on the development of reactors, more than a fifth of it on systems for naval use. The development of power reactors will cost \$119 million in the fiscal year ahead, and the committee puts the AEC on the back for deciding to stop work on a number of reactor types which have come to seem unpromising now that utility companies in the United States are placing orders for reactors almost as quickly as they can. Among the casualties this year are the beryllium oxide reactor experiment and a design involving heavy water as moderator and an organic liquid as coolant.

The Joint Committee has also accepted the view of the AEC that the time has come for a considerable increase of the amount spent on basic physics of various kinds. Plasma physics will get an extra 15 per cent, or a total of \$26 million, in 1968, which reflects the view now current among plasma physicists that the time has come for a deliberate increase of effort in this field. There is also plenty of money for accelerators, and in particular a cool \$50 million for the meson factory which is to be built at Los Alamos.

Oxford in Revolt

THROUGHOUT the months of protest since Mr Anthony Crosland increased university fees for overseas students, it has been hard to find a university prepared to support its principles with hard cash. In the end, Oxford remained true to its traditions of eccentricity and downright dilatoriness. Last week, over six months after Mr Crosland announced the increases, Congregation decided that it did not agree. By 43 votes to 27, the university parliament rejected a motion from the Hebdomadal Council to raise fees from £100 to £150. Even the council's recommendation was something of a rebellion, as Mr Crosland wants to see fees at £250 per year.

What will happen next is still not clear. The decision was apparently taken in an atmosphere approaching open revolt—Mr F. T. B. Millar of Queen's College

suggested that the UGC should have resigned, and Professor Max Beloff regretted that he was unable to impeach Mr Crosland. The cost to Oxford will be £80,000 this year and £120,000 in later years. As a gesture towards payment, a fund has been started by Professor Dorothy Hodgkin of Somerville, Mr George Bennet of Lincoln and Mr R. H. C. Davis of Merton. Each has contributed £5 to the fund, and is busy getting signatures for an appeal and further contributions to the fund. However strongly Oxford dons feel about their decision, though, the fund is hardly likely to soften the blow very much unless wealthy foundations or colleges are prepared to weigh in with substantial contributions.

The Department of Education and Science has nothing to say on the subject. So far as it is concerned, the situation was covered by the original announcement, which assumed that university grants for the next five years would take account of fee income at a rate of £250 per year for each overseas student. Universities charging lower fees than this have a perfect right to do so, but have to find the money themselves. Other universities may feel bitter that once again Oxford's wealth has allowed it more freedom than recent foundations can afford. They may also complain that Oxford will now have first refusal of all the most able candidates from overseas. Oxford itself can claim that its elaborate system of government, often defended on the grounds that it is democratic, has reached a decision more daring than most of its critics would have believed possible. Whether the university can afford to put it into action remains to be seen.

More about Data Processing

WHEN the Post Office (Data Processing) Bill reached its report stage in the House of Commons on July 4, it was clear that the alarms of the Bill's opponents had not been silenced by the committee stage. The objections to the Bill were much the same as they had been when it was first introduced. First, Mr David Price moved an amendment which would force the Postmaster-General to keep a separate account for the Data Processing Service. He feared that the service would be run at a loss, and subsidized by the other postal services, providing the independent computer bureaux with unfair competition. Undertakings that this would not happen were no equal of a protection in law, he thought. Postmaster-Generals come and go, Mr Price said, and not all of them would feel obliged to conform to Mr Short's undertakings.

Mr Short, the Postmaster-General, denied that financial jugglings of the sort the Opposition were suggesting were even possible. Parliament and the press would see to that—he was always open to challenge. Sir Harry Legge-Bourke wondered if this will still be true when the Post Office is reorganized as a public corporation instead of a government department. The clause, however, was withdrawn.

Sir Harry went on to move an amendment which sought to establish that the first duty of the Post Office was to provide data transmission facilities for others—the service, he said, should not be allowed to diminish in the Postmaster-General's mind the need to press on with telecommunications and the ordinary work of the Post Office. Mr Short gave more assurances, and the amendment was withdrawn.