

life counterpart: page-length paragraphs, cluttered with italics and footnotes and latinized neologisms.

The question to be asked is whether this book is genuinely shocking. People who believe in general and complete disarmament will think so and will be grateful to Mr Lewin for exposing the callousness of some American strategists. What could be uglier than to calculate that war is necessary, not only as a balance to an economy otherwise regulated by supply and demand, but as a siphon to remove the ignorant young disruptive men from society? But whether others will find it disturbing is doubtful. Is war really "the principal motivational force for the development of science at every level"? If one cannot assent to this, or similar assertions, then the thesis of Iron Mountain Boys (as they sometimes referred to themselves) loses its force.

It is even possible that this book fails in its purpose: to stimulate people to think about the dependence of the American economy on weapons production and of the American government on the advice of experts who suppose themselves to be objective. It pretends that there is no permanent peace because societies do not find it useful, rather than because aggression is part of the human condition. And it perpetuates the "we-they" myth that is what wars are often about: "We" are quite different from "them" and they are wrong. ("Them" in the context of this book are the think-tanks, the Rand Corporation, the Hudson Institute, and Mr Herman Kahn, the father of the mega corpse.)

A modest proposal, therefore, from an admirer. Mr Lewin is an excellent writer: his dialogue is crisp, his mastery of the idiom faultless, his sense of showmanship superb, and could anyone have thought of a better title? Could he not acknowledge his authorship of this book and go on to writing more fiction? **BRENDA MADDOX**

University News: University College of Swansea

DR P. C. THONEMANN, at present chief research scientist, Division head, Experimental Division B, Culham Laboratory, UKAEA, has been appointed a professor of physics and head of the Department of Physics as from April 22.

Appointments

REAR ADMIRAL JOHN E. CLARK has been appointed deputy director of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory of the California Institute of Technology.

DR S. G. OWEN, at present reader in medicine and clinical sub-dean in the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, has been appointed second secretary to the Medical Research Council.

Announcements

THE Institution of Chemical Engineers has instituted a new medal, the Council Medal, which is to be awarded annually to a person who has given exceptional service to the institution on a special project or projects. The first award is to be made to Mr P. L. Baldwin, in particular for his work as chairman of the working party on "The Controlled Storage and Recovery of Particulate Solids". The Arnold Greene Medal, given annually for contributions to the institution's progress, has been awarded to Mr H. Fossett.

Meetings

ELECTROCHEMISTRY, February 19-23, Melbourne (Dr D. F. A. Koch, Division of Mineral Chemistry, CSIRO, P.O. Box 124, Port Melbourne, Victoria, Australia).

CITRUS Symposium, March 17-26, University of California, Riverside (Professor H. D. Chapman, Department of Soils and Plant Nutrition, University of California, Riverside, California 92502).

METALLURGICAL Developments in Low-Alloy Steels for Mechanical Engineering Applications, April 2-4, Scarborough (Mr J. R. Powell, BISRA, 24 Buckingham Gate, London SW1).

HIGH Pressure Research Meeting, April 9-11, Centre d'Etudes Nucléaires de Cadarache (M. Rapin, CEA, Service MA, B.P. 61, 92 Montrouge, France).

INTERFERENCE Problems associated with the Operation of Microwave Communications Systems, April 22-24, Institution of Electrical Engineers (Conference Department, The Institution of Electrical Engineers, Savoy Place, London WC2).

AUTOMATION for Productivity, May 14-16, Institution of Electrical Engineers (Conference Department, The Institution of Electrical Engineers, Savoy Place, London WC2).

INDUSTRIAL Measurement Techniques for On-line Computers, June 10-14, Institution of Electrical Engineers (Conference Department, The Institution of Electrical Engineers, Savoy Place, London WC2).

CORRESPONDENCE

SI Units

SIR,—The issue of *Nature* of December 30 (216, 1272; 1967) quotes a draft of a document by a committee of the Royal Society on metric units and the SI. Listed together with SI units are "Units to be allowed in conjunction with SI". These are described in the text as "compatible" with SI although the meaning of this is not clear: in many cases it appears to be merely that they are multiples of ten times the SI unit. These multiples are not, in general, in the recommended steps of one thousand.

The SI at last offers a real opportunity of establishing a coherent system of units which is common to both scientists and engineers. Once alternative units are allowed, coherence is lost and we will continue to have "working formulae" (using the non-SI units) which differ from the basic equations. Conversion factors, the curse of applied scientists, will remain with us—and they will be unfamiliar ones. It is difficult to understand why a body such as the Royal Society should advocate the retention of non-SI units such as the poise and stoke—presumably merely because they are familiar. The case for the bar is little better: it is of convenient size for some purposes, but is this of any real consequence? The use of prefixes to indicate multiples and submultiples of basic units is an entirely satisfactory and well established practice: for example, the μF and pF are in everyday practical use, the basic unit, the farad, being itself well outside the range of magnitude commonly encountered. The SI unit of pressure, the N/m^2 , is not far from the centre of the range of common pressure measurement, bearing in mind the existence of vacuum technology.

Is it too late to hope that the Royal Society will fully recognize the advantages of having one unit for one quantity, and of having coherent units, and therefore to abandon the bar, stoke, poise and gauss? No doubt there is justification for a few non-SI units, but it does not exist for these quantities.

G. W. ALDERTON

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