

plaint over the treatment of the remaining 20 per cent.

This classified research did cause some debate in the House of Lords last week, however. Lord Brockway questioned the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Lord Chalfont, on information supplied by Porton to the United States which would be of use in the development of nerve gases such as those used in Vietnam. Lord Chalfont refused to be drawn on this issue and simply stated that all information in this field exchanged with the United States was confidential. He did add that the Government was anxious that the production of biological and chemical weapons be brought into the arms control field and to this end the Government had placed the matter on the agenda at the Geneva Disarmament Conference.

Defence Research

SIR SOLLY ZUCKERMAN, the British Government's chief adviser on science, is not a man given to overstatement. Indeed, since he became chairman of the Central Advisory Council for Science and Technology, he has not been given to statements of any sort. Thus when he told the Select Committee on Science and Technology that some of the Government research establishments "are so dreary as to be unbelievable" it was bound to take notice. Sir Solly, who appeared before the committee on June 13, named no names, but the committee doubtless has its own ideas. Sir Solly firmly rejected the notion that when a defence laboratory has completed its primary purpose, it should be re-deployed in the civil research field. If the objective of a laboratory no longer applied, he said, it should be closed down. "Institutions should not be kept alive merely for the purpose of keeping them alive."

Sir Solly was also critical of some aspects of British defence contracting. He agreed with Mr David Price that there tended to be too great an element of research and development in defence contracts, and claimed that one should never build an aircraft except around existing engines. (This is an argument which the aircraft manufacturers would never accept.) He accepted the argument that "holding contracts", designed to delay expenditure, were likely to do nothing but increase it. Sir Solly also gave the committee some idea of what his advisory council has been up to since its formation. It was engaged, he said, in trying to find out what was spent on research, both defence and civil, and where it was spent. Sir Harry Legge-Bourke was surprised that the facts were not already available, but Sir Solly said that the figures for industry's own expenditure were not known, and the breakdown in government establishments between manpower and materials was also something of a mystery. When the figures were at hand, Sir Solly said, it would be possible to make decisions, but he thought it was unlikely that his council would ever be able to determine the overall allocation of expenditure on research. Under the British accounting system, this was a minister's responsibility, and he could spend as much as he liked, within his budget, on research. Sir Solly did express a hope that it would soon be possible for his council to put forward some advice on the budget of the Science Research Council.

On the planning of defence research contracts, Sir Solly put forward the theory of the "band of uncertainty". As a project advanced, he suggested, this

band should become narrower. This had not happened in a number of defence contracts, and Sir Solly said that this might be one reason why costs tended to increase. On the mobility of scientific manpower, Sir Solly observed that scientists were "sessile" rather than "mobile"—it was difficult to move them from place to place, particularly if the move would mean a change of environment for research. Finally, there was a pat on the back for the Ministry of Technology. "The Ministry of Technology is a good thing", he declared. But it might perhaps do more for small companies, which had "a major part to play".

Parliament in Britain

by our Parliamentary Correspondent

Oceanography

MR GERRY FOWLER, for the Ministry of Technology, stated that no work in the ministry's defence research establishments is directed specifically to the development of oceanography and marine science, but that some work undertaken primarily for defence has been found to have other uses. An example of this is the application of thermal mapping techniques to such marine problems as the discharge of industrial effluents into the sea and work on underwater photography. The ministry is obtaining industry's views on worthwhile research and development projects through the Construction Industry Research and Information Association. (Written answer, June 11.)

Advanced Combat Aircraft

MR JOHN MORRIS, for the Secretary of State for Defence, said that discussions were under way with other European governments about the possible joint development and production of an advanced combat aircraft for the late '70s, but that these discussions—with the German, Dutch, Belgian, Italian and Canadian ministries of defence—had not yet reached any conclusions. He agreed with the points raised by several members concerning the unique amount of development work already carried out by Britain and the capabilities of the British aircraft industry, but added that the Government was not yet in a position to decide whether or not these advantages warranted Britain developing such an aircraft on her own for sale abroad, instead of working in collaboration with other countries. (Oral answer, June 12.)

Mental Illness

MR KENNETH ROBINSON, Minister of Health, was forced to admit that the total expenditure on research into mental disease in his department in 1968-69 amounts to only £54,000. Last year the expenditure was even less—£33,000. Mr Dodds-Parker pointed out that half the hospital beds in Britain were occupied by those with mental disease. Could something not be done to increase the effort? Mr Robinson said that the main agency for medical research was the Medical Research Council, and that the Secretary of State for Education and Science would doubtless take note of the question. Lord Balniell added that 8 per cent of the MRC expenditure went on research into mental disease. Did the minister not think that there ought to be a marked improvement, or a full explanation given to the public, so that this situation be made acceptable to them? Mr Robinson could only suggest that Lord Balniell should ask the minister responsible for the MRC. (Oral answer, June 11.)