

tees. For example, during the last session one clerk supervised the sub-committees dealing with Space Research and Development and the workings of the Industrial Training Act, as well as the Joint Committee on Censorship of the Theatre. It is impossible to expect one man to be an expert in three such diverse fields, but as long as the Treasury controls the purse-strings and can treat the House as "a subordinate Government department", to use Sir Barnett's phrase, the situation seems unlikely to change.

Recruitment is also a problem. There have for the past few years always been one or two vacancies for clerks and at present there are four. Clerks are only recruited by the Civil Service Commission's administrative grade examination; candidates must designate the House of Commons as their first choice and are expected to serve the House for the whole of their professional working life—forty years before they are eligible for a pension. At present, the House of Commons is at a grave disadvantage for, on average, promotion prospects lag ten years behind those of the Civil Service proper. Sir Barnett said "this is the greatest single factor in discouraging recruitment".

In the decision on May 20, Dr David Owen brought up a problem relating specifically to the Science and Technology Committee—the need for a clerk with a scientific background. Without casting aspersions on the hard work of the committee's present clerk, he felt that a trained scientist who was able to build up an expertise in the field would be of invaluable help to the committee. Sir Barnett rejected any possibility of recruiting a trained scientist from outside the Civil Service Commission on the grounds that it would be "destructive of morale" to other clerks who had risen through the ranks over the years. He added that "in theory I could recruit anyone at all on my own initiative, but in practice I would always refuse to recruit from any other source [than the Civil Service]".

Defending Defence

SIR WILLIAM COOK, Chief Adviser (Projects and Research) for the Ministry of Defence, defended himself and his ministry quite ably before the Select Committee on Science and Technology on June 20. Referring to joint projects with other countries, he admitted that there were many drawbacks; administrative machinery was increased and the total cost was usually about 10 to 15 per cent higher. None the less, because each country's share was much lower than if it was working independently, the Government believed the advantages outweighed the disadvantages.

Sir William said that he could not comment on the many cancelled projects of the ministry—such as the TSR2—because these decisions had been made before he took up his post, but he did suggest that the ministry's machinery for assessing projects was steadily improving. As they become more sure of the viability of projects before starting them, the risk of cancellation is decreased. Many of the ministries, the Ministry of Technology especially, are trying to encourage a system in which managers take control of particular projects. This will take time, however, for, as Sir William said, "The Civil Service is not used to individuals making decisions". There has been a great increase in the past few years in courses for project managers, but the present method of training managers, Sir William said,

is to start them on small projects and move them gradually to big ones, a slow and not entirely satisfactory arrangement.

Sir William bemoaned the fact that it was still impossible for scientists to move freely between industry and government research establishments. He himself wanted to see a completely free market between the two with complete interchange of pension schemes, but saw little hope of this happening in the near future.

Costly Airbus

THE European airbus project, which only a month ago seemed well set, has now run into more trouble. For one thing, Mr John Stonehouse, Minister of State at the Ministry of Technology, has got around to admitting to the House of Commons that the cost of the project has increased sharply, from £190 million to £285 million. This should have come as no surprise, for the Federal German Government admitted as much some weeks ago. It turns out that the engines, which were to cost £60 million, will in fact run to £70 million and the airframe, originally priced at £130 million, will now cost £215 million. Connoisseurs of aircraft costing will no doubt regard this as no more than a foretaste of what is to come, because Mr Stonehouse said that the figures were subject to further negotiation. Aircraft costs rarely go down with negotiation.

As usual on occasions like this, the increased costs can be attributed, in part at least, to changes in specification. The airlines asked for more powerful Rolls-Royce RB 207 engines and heavier internal equipment. But devaluation has also played a part, according to Mr Stonehouse. The increase in costs, together with a distinctly lukewarm attitude on the part of some airlines—notably Lufthansa—must now put the project in jeopardy. The ministers concerned from France, UK and Germany will be meeting next month for further discussion, and the future of the project will depend on the airlines ordering at least 75 airbuses. With coolness from Germany, economic trouble in France, and the distinct danger of further financial travail for Britain, it cannot be said to be a very cheerful prospect. Meanwhile Boeing has begun work on an airbus design which bears some striking resemblances to the European airbus.

Matrons Scorned

THE resignation of two matrons within a short space of time suggests that discontent among hospital staff is on the increase. It was announced last week that Miss Marian Smith, matron of Stepping Hill Hospital, Stockport, had resigned because of lack of confidence in the administration of the hospital. This follows the resignation of Miss A. Johnson, matron of Guy's Hospital, nearly three weeks ago.

These two events seem to stem from the same cause—matrons simply do not wield today the power they used to. Together with senior nurses they are assuming more and more responsibility, but their opinions are not being taken into account. It would not be a gross exaggeration to say that the concept of an all-powerful, dictatorial matron is fast disappearing, and this is perhaps no bad thing, because no individual can successfully carry the burden of running a hospital.