

NEWS AND VIEWS

Research with Animals

Two private members' Bills, the Body and Pounder Bills, are shortly coming up for their second readings in the British House of Commons—on May 24 and 10. The first aims to abolish any experiment on animals not conducted under full anaesthetic; the second has the object of prohibiting the export from Britain of all experimental animals. If both Bills became law, biological research would be hit disastrously.

The Body Bill, introduced on January 30 by its sponsor, Mr Richard Body, MP for Holland-with-Boston, was described this week by the Director of the Medical Research Council's Laboratory Animals Centre, Mr John Bleby, as having "no merit whatsoever". Indeed, the Bill would completely obstruct the adequate testing of drugs, food additives, experiments with control animals (an essential part of most biological research), and many other important medical and biological researches including the vital immunological testing without which transplantation of organs and tissues would be impossible. Many drugs require long-term testing for up to two years or more—and it is obviously impossible to keep an animal under anaesthetic for this length of time. It is paradoxical that the Medicines Bill, now in the process of passing through Parliament, calls for even more stringent testing of new drugs before they are prescribed for humans.

Operations on vertebrate animals are already covered by the Cruelty to Animals Act 1876, and the regulations covering surgery are enforced by the Home Office inspectors. The nature of experiments on any vertebrate is restricted by the terms of the licence. This Act does need updating to meet modern conditions, but there does not seem much cause for worry that in Britain, at least, humane methods are used in animal experiments—the inspectors seem to make sure of that. The Government is at the moment considering the recommendations of the Littlewood committee which reported in 1965 on experiments on animals, and no doubt there will eventually be Government legislation to improve the 1876 Act. But it is certain that the welfare of animals kept under intensive livestock husbandry systems (studied by the Brambell Committee) and the misuse of antibiotics given to animals reared under these conditions are more urgent problems.

While Mr Body (who lists his hobby as field sports) is alarmed about animal experiments in Britain, Mr Rafton Pounder, MP for Belfast South, is worried about the export of animals from this country "for vivisectional research abroad". His Bill was first introduced in the last parliamentary session, but it failed to get a second reading. The threat of the Bill provoked letters to *The Times* from Mr Bleby and

Professor Sir Alexander Hadow early last year, in which they pointed out the effects of the Bill on biological and medical research. The Bill also prompted the Biological Council to print and circulate a memorandum in November 1967 on how the Bill would affect research, especially in the cancer field, in immunology and in biological assay. The new Pounder Bill, introduced on March 20, seems little different from the earlier one. Indeed, it repeats the inaccuracies and exaggerations pointed out by Mr Bleby in his letter to *The Times* on January 28, 1967. Both in his earlier Bill and in the present one, Mr Pounder claims that in no other country than Britain is there legislation comparable to the Cruelty to Animals Act. While there may be no strictly comparable laws, Sweden, Denmark and France do have legislation covering experiments with animals, and it will not be long before there will be legislation for experiments inside laboratories in the United States. Mr Bleby has said that his comments last year in *The Times* still stand today—"the Bill will seriously impede biological research because it will stop the export of breeding nuclei of specialized strains of animals vital to research in cancer, genetics, toxicology, and, equally important, the diseases of animals themselves. Furthermore the Bill would not prevent the export of laboratory animals under the guise of pets. If Mr Pounder persists with his Bill it should embody amendments permitting the free exchange of breeding nuclei of specialized strains and the export of animals to reputable institutions". Without such amendments the Bill would, of course, prohibit exports to the Pasteur Institute and to other research institutes of similar standing.

In all the circumstances, it is perhaps just as well that there is no immediate prospect of the two Bills becoming law—private members' Bills do not usually get far in the House of Commons (which is nothing to be pleased about). At the same time, however, the interests which have given the two Bills their present head of steam are by no means negligible. The best defence against them is to demonstrate that research with animals is usually carried out responsibly, and that pointless cruelty to animals is as much scorned in the laboratories as in the kindergartens.

Birds come to Town

THE recolonization, by animals or plants, of habitats from which they have been driven by pollution of one sort or another is a sure sign that levels of pollution are falling. This is why the latest report to the Ministry of Public Building and Works of the Committee on Bird Sanctuaries in the Royal Parks for the years 1956-66, which was published last week (HMSO, 6s.), makes en-