

anticipate a complete ban on overland supersonic flight. That is perhaps the most realistic factor in their calculations, which lead them to say they will sell two hundred Concorde by 1975.

Mr Healey on Top

THE Secretary of State for Defence has been at his job for much longer than the Select Committee on Science and Technology. The difference in experience was clear when Mr Healey gave evidence to the committee last week. For a bluff and cheerful two hours, Mr Healey instructed the committee on the ins and outs of defence research. It was an impressive performance—helped, it must be conceded, by some indifferent questioning from the committee.

Mr Healey started by explaining that the withdrawal of British forces from the Far East is unlikely to save money for research and development, since very little of the work is explicitly designed for that part of the world. The research expenditure is likely to remain about 11 per cent of the total defence budget. Collaboration, once achieved, could give savings, but the total cost of the project would be up by about 20 per cent. Defence research could only be justified by defence needs, not by any appeal to the benefits it might bring to the civil field. But the Far East withdrawal did mean that Britain's defence needs were now more closely identified with those of Europe, which should make collaboration easier. Mr Healey was unimpressed by the suggestion that there were large areas of research which could be put out to industry. For one thing, he said, most of the problems were those industry had no interest in solving, and there would in any case be a continuing need for the work to be monitored, so that some expertise would have to be retained by the ministry. The easiest way of doing this was by keeping the establishments open. In any case, Mr Healey doubted whether the staff redeployed would move quickly into industry—people tended to be far too optimistic about this, he said.

Later, Mr Healey denied that the organization of the Ministry of Defence was "a jungle". It was more like a well planned garden, he said, though it was unfamiliar "to those who strayed in from the surrounding countryside". To those who claimed that the organization chart was too complicated, Mr Healey recommended opening the back of a transistor radio; although it looked complicated, it was really very simple, he suggested. In this, Mr Healey found an unexpected ally in Mr Tam Dalyell, who believes that time spent on organizational details is time wasted. Mr Healey was also doubtful of the value of the building block concept of defence procurement. This idea, which Mr David Price put forward, holds that if defence procurement is based on existing technology without building into the specification the need for extensive research and development, it is cheaper and more effective. Mr Healey doubted that it would be cheaper; the US F111 aircraft, made on the building block approach, had cost £400 million, without taking into account the costs of the building blocks themselves, while the cost of the TSR2, built by the British approach, would have been £300 million. The US system was "appallingly expensive", he said. And although there might be some delays in the British system, it was nothing like as bad as people suggested.

Parliament in Britain

by our Parliamentary Correspondent

British Museum

MR BOYD-CARPENTER asked the Prime Minister why no consultation had taken place between him and the Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries before the Government announcement that the British Museum Library could not be built in Bloomsbury. Mr Wilson said that the consultation would have been between the standing commission and the Secretary of State for Education and Science, but that Mr Gordon-Walker had not thought the subject of such direct concern as to make advance consultation necessary. Mr Wilson added that he was grateful to Lord Rosse, chairman of the commission, for agreeing to help the Dainton Committee in its work. It was, he agreed, arguable whether or not Lord Rosse should have been consulted. (Oral answer, July 16.)

Defence Research

MR GERRY REYNOLDS, for the Ministry of Defence, said that by the end of March 1971 the numbers of scientists and other professional grades employed in defence work would be reduced by 6 per cent compared with numbers previously planned for that year, and by 4.5 per cent compared with present numbers. (Written answer, July 16.)

Power Stations

MR ROY MASON, the Minister of Power, told Mr Arthur Palmer that he was setting up a committee to investigate delays in the commissioning of power stations. The terms of reference were: "To enquire into the causes of delays in commissioning CEGB power stations, and measures to remedy them, and to make recommendations about any further action that may be required". The chairman of the committee is to be Sir Alan Wilson, Chairman of the Glaxo Group and Deputy Chairman of the Electricity Council, and there will be five other members. The committee would keep in touch with the NEDC working party on large industrial construction sites, in order to eliminate unnecessary duplication. It is noteworthy that the committee's brief refers only to the CEGB, and not to the Scottish boards. (Written answer, July 17.)

Computers

DR JEREMY BRAY, for the Ministry of Technology, gave a breakdown of the £11.6 million which the Government has authorized in support of the British computer industry. The Science Research Council spends £2.5 million per year, and the National Research Development Corporation £3.0 million (excluding £4 million lent to ICL). The Ministry of Technology has a ceiling of £2.6 million on the Advanced Computer Technology Project, £2.5 million on the Atlas Computer Aided Design Centre at Cambridge, £0.5 million on university research contracts and another £0.5 on UKAEA sponsored work. Dr Bray also gave details of the total spent in support since the beginning of computing. It includes £6.6 million from NRDC, and £1.08 million spent so far of the money allocated to the Advanced Computer Technology Project. But these totals do not include the cost of work in government establishments, or expenditure for military purposes, and application projects and computer purchases are also excluded. (Written answer, July 18.)