

well its influence has grown but, at the same time, also a fine illustration of its weaknesses. The first thing to be said is that the statement which has been agreed between the two sides should enormously strengthen the hands of those students, and those among the university faculties in Britain, who would like to see a more liberal interpretation of the constitution of the universities. Certainly the students will be extremely foolish, in the term ahead, if they do not begin by finding out how fully their own universities are prepared to implement the suggestions which the vice-chancellors have agreed. But what will happen if some university chooses only to make the most trivial concessions to the position which the students are likely to take up? Where the universities have the initiative, the most likely conflicts will centre on the suggestions that students should have some opportunity to comment on the content of courses and curricula, for here some universities have already unwisely set their faces against change. Will the Committee of Vice-Chancellors be prepared to listen to the complaints of students, if necessary over the heads of the universities concerned? And if not, will not the students have a case for saying that the agreement with the vice-chancellors is ineffectual? To be sure, the students who negotiated the agreement are equally unable to count on the compliance of all those they seem to represent but as the senior partners in the pact, the vice-chancellors' weakness will necessarily seem the more serious. This is why the committee's initiative is courageous, to say the least of it. But if the agreement with the students can be made to work, the prestige the vice-chancellors' committee will gain should serve it well in other fields.

NUCLEAR POWER

On the Road to Commerce

THE United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority seems to be well on the road towards becoming a nationalized industry in what has now become a more or less familiar pattern in Britain. The fourteenth annual report, published on Wednesday this week, records the decline of expenditure on research and development in the past year and, at the same time, the growing strength of the strictly commercial parts of the authority's work—those principally concerned with the manufacture and sale of nuclear fuels of various kinds. There is also the prospect that royalties will soon begin to flow under the terms of the agreements with private companies and the electricity boards, although it is also clear that by stockpiling uranium ore at the top of the market a few years ago the authority has confirmed its place among the large number of individuals and organizations who have burnt their fingers on uranium. In the circumstances, it is more than a little odd that the report has almost nothing to say about the steps which have yet to be taken to implement the Government's intention that the industry shall be reorganized.

The reduction of expenditure on research has been quite dramatic—from a total of £70.3 million in 1966–

67 to £59.7 million in 1967–68. Most of the important establishments for research and development maintained by the AEA have shrunk in one way or another. Thus expenditure at Harwell has predictably fallen from £17.3 million to £16.5 million, and something like ten per cent of the total expenditure there is now devoted to projects unconnected with the development of nuclear power. One of the biggest reductions of scale has been at Risley, in Lancashire, where the AEA maintains a complex of metallurgical laboratories and design offices, and where expenditure on research and development has fallen from £13 million to £10.6 million in the course of a year. Laboratories in general have spent less, although the shrinkage at Culham (from £4.5 million in 1966–67 to £4.4 million in the most recent year) is rather less than would have been expected in view of the decision a year ago that the budget there should shrink in the next five years by roughly ten per cent a year. (The report also points out that the decision to reduce the scale of work on fusion research at Culham, originally taken by a committee of the AEA, can if necessary be reconsidered if circumstances should change.) At Dounreay, which is the chief site for the development of fast reactors, on the other hand, expenditure on research and development has modestly increased from £9.2 million to £10.3 million.

INDUSTRIAL REORGANIZATION

Laboratories on the Dole?

THE latest moves in the reorganization of the British heavy electrical industry seem to have aggravated anxiety among the substantial numbers of scientists employed at the commercial research laboratories working in this field. As things are, the Plessey bid for English Electric and the counter-proposal that English Electric and General Electric should be merged are hanging fire, no doubt because the Industrial Reorganization Corporation and other government agencies are working away behind the scenes. In the circumstances, however, nobody will be surprised that scientists are uneasy about the future. Some people are even said to be casting about for jobs elsewhere, on the principle that it may be better to get out while the going is good or at least passable.

No one is prepared to comment on the extent of rationalization that will be considered necessary if the English Electric merger with GEC does take place, but a possible indication is the extent of the reorganization involved in last year's takeover of Associated Electrical Industries by GEC. AEI's central research section was transferred from Derby to GEC's Hirst laboratory at Wembley, and the telecommunications laboratory at Harlow was shut down. Engineering work at a factory in Birmingham has been reduced and a factory at Woolwich is in the process of closing down. The number of redundancies and "voluntary" departures arising from these pruning operations was about 6,000. However, there is expansion in other areas and the company, said a spokesman, is continuing to recruit. GEC's new management is noted for its intolerance of what is called "dead wood", although Lord Nelson, chairman of English Electric, hopes that the merger will mean "less redundancy than otherwise" because of increased orders from competitive overseas markets.