

Parliament in Britain

by our Parliamentary Correspondent

Science in Hospitals

MR DAVID ENNALS, for the Department of Health and Social Security, welcomed the publication of the report on Hospital Scientific and Technical Services prepared by the committee under Sir Solly Zuckerman. The Government, he said, agreed that administrative arrangements should be made to improve operational planning of scientific and technical services; hospital authorities were being consulted. In reply to points raised by Mr Maurice Macmillan, Mr Ennals said that the widest consultation would take place, and that the place of the teaching hospitals would "in no way be vitiated by the recommendations if they were carried through". (Statement, December 6.)

Overseas Students

MRS SHIRLEY WILLIAMS said that there are now 15,497 overseas students in British universities, and another 15,401 in other grant-aided further education establishments: 7,761 had received support from public funds for the relief of hardship after the introduction of higher fees, and this cost a total of £444,000. (Written answer, December 6.)

Research Associations

MR GERRY FOWLER provided Mr Will Owen with a useful list which details the grants paid by the Ministry of Technology to each of the forty-three research

associations which are now aided. The Ship Research Association does best, with a grant of just over £500,000. The Welding RA receives almost £300,000, the Scientific Instrument RA about £200,000, and the Construction Industry RA some £180,000. (Written answer, December 6.)

Power

WILL Drax B power station be fuelled by coal? This is the question which was exercising Mr George Jeger last week. Mr Roy Mason pointed out that the CEGB already has statutory permission to build a coal-fired extension to Drax, but that it was not in the current investment programme. The start on Drax 2 would depend on the demand for electricity, and the growth of competing fuels. That cannot have been much of a comfort to Mr Jeger, who said that there were fears and suspicions in the area about the CEGB's intentions. (Oral answer, December 10.)

Motorway Box

MR HUGH JENKINS asked the Minister of Transport what was being done to compensate house-owners for the decline in value of their property which would result from the building of the Motorway Box. Mr Richard Marsh said that the subject formed part of a general study on compensation coordinated by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. Mr Jenkins suggested that it might be better to put the box further out of London, but Mr Marsh was not to be drawn. (Oral answers, December 9.)

How to dam the English Channel

THE competition to build a Channel dam (*Nature*, 219, 991; 1968) attracted close on a score of entries. In the circumstances, it is not surprising that none of them really questioned the feasibility of damming the Channel—the competition, after all, was intended to answer the question how to build a dam and not whether to build one. The particular suggestions put forward by the competitors are not always sufficiently informed by the thorough understanding of the oceanographic and geological conditions in the English Channel which a successful project to construct a dam would have somehow to exploit. As with many other contemporary problems, it seems quite plain that more research is urgently necessary.

What follows is a brief account of some of the more interesting of the proposals to dam the English Channel. It is hoped that these will stimulate further discussion and that the result will be a deeper understanding of the problems.

One of the most detailed entries was submitted by Mr CLAUDE HARDY, who lives and works in Paris. Mr Hardy has been advocating the construction of a Channel dam for more than two decades. He advocates a simple earth and rock filled dam extending some 32 kilometres between South Foreland and Cap Gris Nez. In Mr Hardy's view, the dam could be combined with impounding pools which could be used to generate 35 ×

10⁹ kWh of electricity a year and thus make a substantial contribution to the supply of energy in Britain. Mr Hardy is also impressed with the ease with which a fixed barrage across the Channel would enable surface transport to flow between Britain and the mainland.

As with many other schemes, Mr Hardy's method of constructing the dam relies on the comparatively shallow depth of the Channel between Britain and France—an average of 20 fathoms (120 feet) and a maximum of 30 fathoms (180 feet). In this view of the

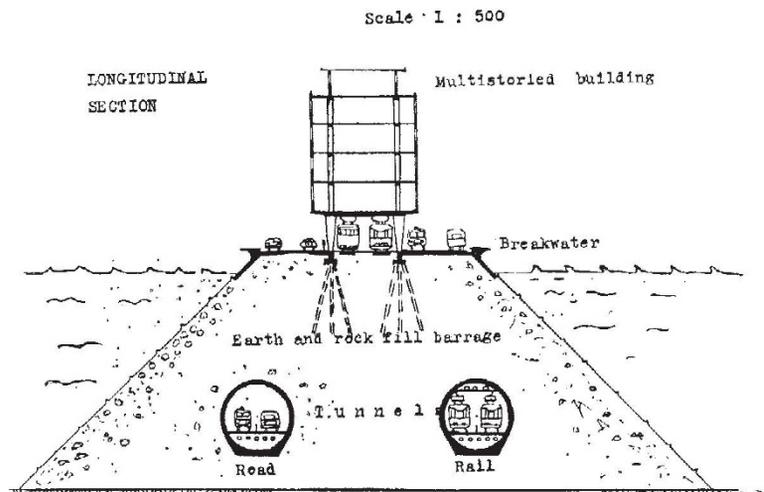


Fig. 1.