

large new find "would establish a new situation". Already the fuel market is being expected to absorb by 1971 three times the present gas consumption. It would be very difficult to find a home for any more than this and Sir Henry said that "future finds will set a price at which they will sell." It is fair to infer from this that the price would be considerably less than that agreed last week with Shell and Esso.

For the British consumer, the contract prices should mean cheaper gas. Indeed, the Gas Council is going out of its way to point out that natural gas customers are already getting 0.5 pence to 1 pence off each therm as soon as they start to use natural gas. Eight area gas boards—all but the Scottish and South Wales Boards—are linked up to the natural gas pipelines which come ashore at Bacton and Easington, and the system will be extended next year to include the two boards now excluded. Negotiations with some large industrial consumers, like the British Steel Corporation, are now in progress. But at least one large market, in electricity generation, has been ruled out by the Ministry of Power. The Gas Council can hope to displace only oil as a fuel for electricity generation—coal is altogether too awkward a subject at the moment. It is also very unlikely that the CEGB would look kindly on any industry which planned to generate its own electricity from cheap gas. The Gas Council therefore intends to use the gas to replace fuel oil at the lighter end of the range first, afterwards moving towards the heavier and cheaper grades.

Despite the size of the finds, natural gas is still likely to take a comparatively small part of the total energy market. The total market is now running at about 300 million tons of coal equivalent a year. The maximum rate of gas flow, when the peak figure of 2,000 million cubic feet a day is reached, will represent a mere 25 million tons of coal equivalent a year.

MEDICAL RESEARCH

A Duke Translated

THE Duke of Northumberland, appointed last week as chairman of the Medical Research Council, has a long history of such jobs. Before his resignation on June 30, he had for ten years been the chairman of the Agricultural Research Council—a job befitting one of England's largest hereditary landowners, with a vested interest in the well-being of the farming industry. He is chancellor of Newcastle University, and chairman of the committee investigating last year's foot and mouth disease epidemic.

On the face of it, the Duke's qualifications for his new post are less obvious than those for his chairmanship of the ARC, but as far as scientific matters go his duties are not onerous. The chairman of the MRC has traditionally been a member of the House of Lords—the Duke's immediate predecessors are Lord Shawcross and Lord Amory—indeed, under the old MRC charter the council had to include a member of both Houses of Parliament. The idea was apparently that men wise in public affairs would offer the less worldly academic members of the council useful advice when it came to dealing with the Government.

In the MRC's new charter, granted last year when the council came under the Department of Education and Science instead of the Privy Council, this clause

has been deleted. But for the present at least there is still a member of parliament—Mr Donald Marquand—on the council as well as a peer. Apart from *ad hoc* consultations at the request of the secretary or other council members, they are expected to attend only the nine council meetings in any one year, and then it seems to be a matter of listening to the professionals.

Parliament in Britain

Synthetic Foodstuffs

THE Prime Minister said that production of synthetic foodstuffs would remain the responsibility of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Considerable efforts were already devoted to work in this field. Many oil companies were working on the development of proteins from natural oil and natural gas, and the Agricultural Research Council had for many years been working on the extraction of protein from plant materials. The ministry's marine laboratories and the Tropical Products Institute were trying to find proteins in the sea. This work, the Prime Minister said, was still in the research and development stage and it was too early to tell whether it will be of commercial value or will help relieve poverty and hunger. (Oral answer, December 17.)

Sonic Booms

A TOTAL of eleven supersonic bangs were made over the south of England in July 1967 to "provide wider experience for the public of the nature of sonic bangs". In a statement about the results, Mr A. Wedgwood Benn, the Minister of Technology, said that his department had received about 12,000 complaints from an estimated 12 million people affected by the bangs. About £4,000 was paid for claims of damage or injury attributed to the bangs. These results were being used in the collaborative research programme with the French and the Americans on the nature and effects of sonic booms. (Written answer, December 17.)

Cyclamates

ASKED whether he would restrict the use of cyclamates in food and soft drinks, while the report to the American Food and Drug Administration of possible chromosome damage from these substances was being considered, Mr J. Hoy, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, said that such measures would not be justified. The report seemed to be highly preliminary and inconclusive. (Written answer, December 18.)

Red Tape

A COMMITTEE, under the chairmanship of Mr J. F. Mallabar, will start work in the new year examining whether "the existing organization and systems of control and accountability of large scale establishments in the ministries of defence and technology, engaged in production, offer impediments to the achievement of full efficiency, and to recommend how such impediments should be removed". The Prime Minister announced that Mr A. P. Coldrick of the Transport Salaried Staffs Association, Mr J. R. Edwards of Joseph Lucas, Mr K. A. B. Moore of Reckitt and Coleman, Mr R. O'Brien of Delta Metal, and Miss Joan Woodward, Reader in Industrial Sociology at Imperial College, had been appointed to the committee. (Written answer, December 19.)