

in thermal reactors will affect the demand for uranium very much. The estimate for demand in the second half of the next decade is quite large—between 73,000 and 106,000 short tons of  $U_3O_8$  a year.

It is impossible to predict where new uranium supplies will be discovered. The OECD report, however, has charted the present uranium production of nine countries (Argentina, Australia, Canada, France, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden and the United States) as well as their potential for the next few years. Of these, Canada seems to have the greatest room for expansion—its present annual production is 4,200 tons of  $U_3O_8$  (each ton of which yields 770 kg of uranium metal), a capacity which it could triple in five years time. The United States capacity is more fully stretched: 13,000 short tons in 1968, a potential of 16,000 tons within a few years. All of these countries have thousands of tons of reserves, but to tap these would probably be prohibitively expensive, at least in the immediate future.

#### TELECOMMUNICATIONS

### Post Office under Fire

THE attack on the Post Office Bill, the legislation to turn the Post Office into a public corporation, seems to be led by the Confederation of British Industry. The bill is at present in the committee stage, but is expected to become law during the summer. Criticism is coming chiefly from the suppliers of telecommunications equipment, worried that under the new bill the Post Office will be allowed to make inroads into their spheres of activity without the restrictions with which private industry lives. And industry as a big user of Post Office telecommunications services has a host of worries about the way the services are going to be run in future. The computer service bureaux are particularly likely to be affected. One of their fears is that the bill does not ensure that the Post Office will not discriminate against the private bureaux in favour of its own National Data Processing Service.

The root cause of the discontent is that when the Post Office becomes a public corporation, its activities will not be watched over by Parliament to anything like the extent they are now. This is why the CBI wants the wording of the bill tightened up so that there can be no doubt about what the Post Office is forbidden to do. Although the Government has made an effort to allay many of the fears by assurances given during standing committee debates, the CBI is not satisfied.

Under the new bill, parliamentary scrutiny is replaced by what is called a Post Office Users' Council. Major proposals relating to any of the Post Office's main services have to be referred to the council, but the CBI says that this leaves a loophole. They want the wording altered so that proposals relating to any of the Post Office services have to be referred to the council. They would also like the chairman of the Users' Council to be an *ex officio* member of the governing body of the Post Office.

The power the Post Office will have to manufacture telecommunications equipment seems chiefly to worry the CBI and the trade associations which it represents. They argue that this clause in the bill, designed to restrict manufacturing by the Post Office, will not put it on the same footing as private industry. The aim

is to limit the Post Office to what it does now, coupled with regulations to prevent any manufacturing activity being hidden in the accounts. On top of this, the CBI wants to bring the Post Office within the terms of reference of the Monopolies Commission, unheard of in the nationalized industries. The hope is that this will put the Post Office and private industry on the same terms.

What particularly annoys the CBI is that, as well as itself having power to manufacture, the new Post Office will continue to censor equipment provided to customers by other manufacturers for connexion into the telecommunications network. Although there is little hope that the Postmaster General will give way on this point, the CBI is still hoping to see a move toward the situation in the United States and West Germany, where it is legal to plug equipment other than that provided by the Post Office into the telephone system, provided a protective device is incorporated. As well as giving customers a wider choice of equipment, this would, the CBI hopes, improve the export potential of the suppliers.

There are also a host of niggling little worries which the CBI has taken up. Prospective users of the National Data Processing Service are bothered about the secrecy of the information being processed. And the computer service bureaux are worried that if they want to run a private data network themselves they will have to apply for a licence from the Post Office, their main competitors. It is hard to think that even the Post Office will thank Mr Stonehouse for saddling it with responsibility for discriminating among its own would-be competitors. And is it really sensible to set up a state monopoly in such a quickly moving field without also providing some means of regulating it as time goes on?

#### VACCINES

### Wellcome Supplies Frozen

THE Ministry of Health last week asked local medical officers of health to stop using 'Wellcovax', the measles vaccine manufactured by Burroughs Wellcome. This follows the reports of three cases of encephalitis among children treated with the vaccine 8–12 days previously. The cause of death of a fourth child, who had also been vaccinated, has not yet been established, but a spokesman at Burroughs Wellcome said that an inquest is to be held.

Burroughs Wellcome has been marketing the vaccine—prepared at their laboratories in Beckenham—for two years. So far, more than a million doses have been distributed in Britain and another four million doses overseas—chiefly in Brazil and Hong Kong. The virus strain is Beckenham 31, a further attenuated version of the Edmonston strain of Enders developed in the United States and taken over by the Beckenham laboratory in 1958. A spokesman at Burroughs Wellcome said this week that, although it is true that this strain causes more adverse reactions than the Schwartz strain used by Glaxo (which shares the measles vaccine market), these reactions are essentially mild and include, for example, slight fever and/or a rash. Furthermore, the immunity conferred by using this slightly more virulent strain seems to be longer lasting than that conferred by the Schwartz strain.