

sites for a third London airport, and it would be disrespectful of the Thames Estuary Development Company to suggest that the announcement last week is quite unconnected with the fact that Mr Justice Roskill is at present sitting with a commission to select a number of sites for an airport which could then be subjected, each in turn, to the formal processes of a public inquiry. For what rumour is worth, the original controversial site at Stansted seems to be low on the Roskill list—some say that it is not there at all—but the outstation in mid-Bedfordshire of the Royal Aircraft Establishment, already provided with a long if somewhat undulant runway, has been advanced to near the top.

The new consortium on the Thames has its eyes as much on the sea as the air, however. The company has been formed from five organizations, two public and three private. No doubt the Port of London Authority is essential, if only because the Maplin Sands are within its territory. The Southend Council represents the local authority most likely to benefit. Then there are two civil engineering companies—John Howard and Company and John Mowlem and Company—and one oil shipping company—London and Thames Haven Oil Wharves.

The chief difficulty is to find some way of reclaiming a block of land which will nevertheless remain accessible by a 90 foot channel for which the cost of maintenance will not turn out to be excessive. If that should be possible, the consortium looks forward to the rapid development of the area into a port able to rub shoulders with Europort at Rotterdam. From this point of view, the optimists say, the siting of a third London airport on Maplin Sands would be an uncovenanted benefit. The immediate task, however, is to see whether the scheme is practicable, and for this reason the group is planning to spend the next six or eight weeks on the design of the kinds of experimental studies which will be needed to test the viability of the project. It seems not yet to have been decided whether computer analysis will be sufficient or whether a large scale hydraulic

model will be necessary. Certainly the study will have to be elaborate enough to include the effects of Coriolis forces, which is a measure of the scale of the enterprise. It may then take eighteen months before it is known whether a stable channel in the mouth of the river can be found, which means that the Maplin Sands are unlikely to dry out for at least another decade.

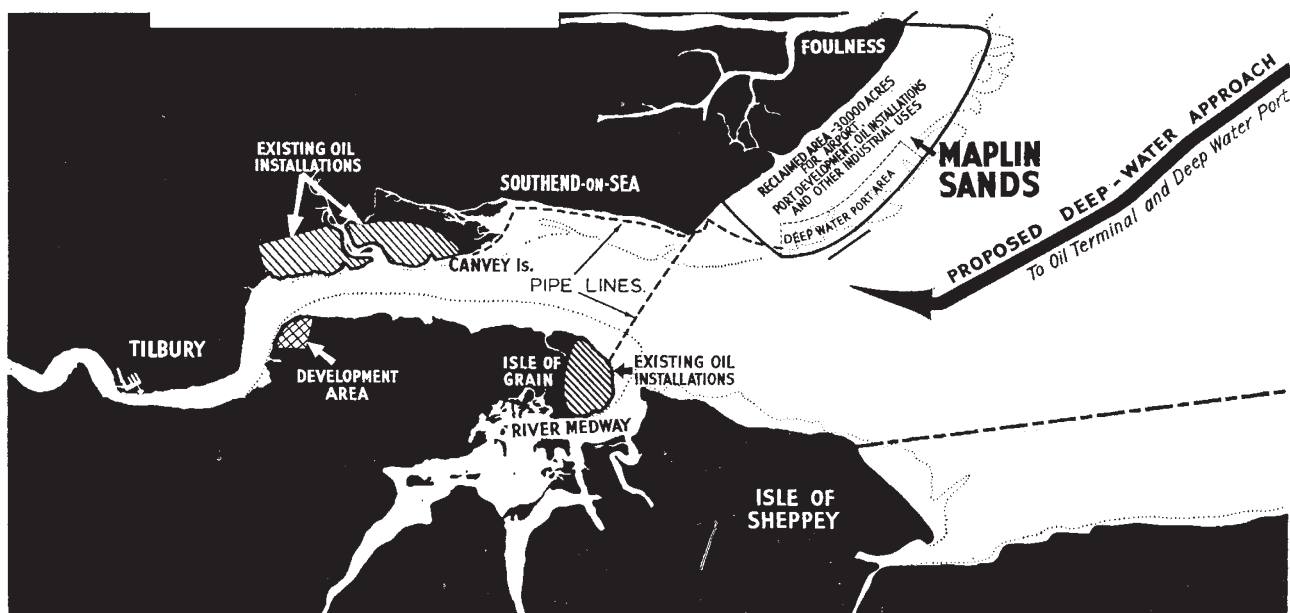
#### INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS

### FEBS in Spain

THERE will be something of a cloud over the sixth meeting of the Federation of European Biochemical Societies (FEBS), arranged many months ago and due to be held in Madrid in April this year. Recently Spain entered a phase of some political turbulence, called by the authorities a "State of Exception", and the University of Madrid is closed. Several voices have been raised in FEBS circles questioning the advisability of meeting in Madrid in these circumstances. The most open sign of discontent so far is a letter from forty-eight faculty members at the University of Konstanz which calls on FEBS to cancel the April meeting, or to convene it elsewhere, "in view of the latest dictatorial acts in Spain".

Professor S. P. Datta and Professor H. R. V. Arnstein, respectively treasurer and secretary-general of FEBS, have just returned to London from a visit to Madrid, and their feeling is that, unless the Spanish political situation suddenly and seriously deteriorates, the meeting should go on as planned. Apparently the closure at the university is only partial—undergraduate teaching is stopped, but graduate training and research continue. The trouble—shades of LSE started in the Law and Economics faculties. The faculties of science are said to have been untroubled.

Whatever this implies, there is no obvious obstacle to the FEBS meeting. The Spanish authorities have guaranteed that all biochemists, whatever their political complexion, will be granted access to the meeting.



The group at Konstanz indicates clearly enough, however, that the practicalities of the meeting are for them of secondary interest. It will be interesting to see how far their case is met by the statement of policy on which the Executive Committee is now working, and which will refer not just to the Madrid meeting but to general issues of politics in scientific meetings.

#### PLANNING

### Art Galleries under Pressure

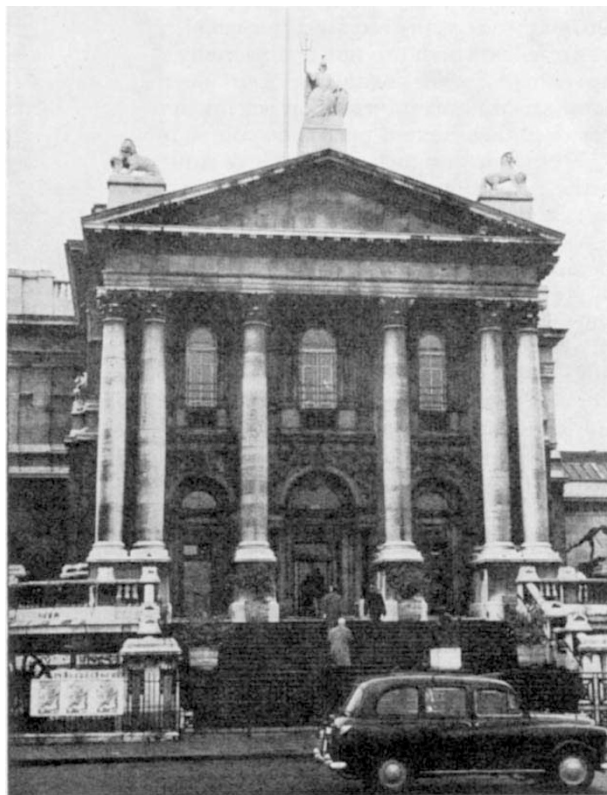
A REAPPRAISAL of public policy towards art galleries in Britain may spring from the controversy which has been raging for the past month over the proposed extensions to the Tate Gallery in London. The Government has now announced that it is considering holding an inquiry into the whole business—the fourth there has been into the gallery's affairs. An inquiry in itself would be a good thing—it should divert public discussion from the architectural merit of the present portico to the more important problems of future organization and economics of the Tate Gallery in particular and the national collection of paintings and sculpture in general. The most serious danger is that if the inquiry is not handled carefully, the issue could become a wrangle. A decision is required urgently by the Tate's trustees—they have been kept waiting quite long enough for the extension they would now like to build and must naturally be worried that the Government may change its mind about the £1 million promised for the extensions. (The ups and downs in the building of a National Theatre are not encouraging.)

The present controversy came to a head with the publication of plans for the extensions at the beginning of February. What the architects suggest is that the gallery should be extended to twice its present size by means of additions at the back and that the late Victorian portico should be replaced. The cost would be about £2 million and the result would provide space for showing about 700 more works of art as well as improved facilities for the staff, research and conservation, and a public restaurant overlooking the River Thames. The trustees admit that the scheme is a compromise.

They have ruled out alternative schemes such as a multistorey extension at the back of the present site and a new building on one of the adjacent sites occupied by the British Army. They admit that the extensions would provide room only for 15 years.

The plans had the blessing of the Royal Fine Art Commission and the Westminster City Council. Trouble came when the Historic Buildings Board of the Greater London Council rejected the scheme at its meeting last October, chiefly on the grounds that the loss of the portico would ruin not only the gallery, built in the 1890s to the design of Sydney Smith, but also the appearance of the riverside frontage along Millbank. It was argued that although the gallery is architecturally not very exciting, it is a welcome contrast to the tightly packed drab commercial buildings around it and on the other side of the river. The GLC has in fact no powers of veto, and decision rests with the Minister of Public Buildings. The stand to save the portico has, however, been supported by impassioned pleas from the public, and the Historic Buildings Council has also added its weight to the campaign. Lately, the controversy has developed with more reasoned discussion about the

whole future of the gallery. The most supported lobby is for keeping the Tate's present building intact (possibly with an extension at the back) and for building a new national gallery of modern art somewhere else.



The trustees have answers to these suggestions on administrative and economic grounds. Even if one of the army sites were free, they say that the cost of a new gallery (reckoned to be £12 million) would be prohibitively high. But it is unlikely that a new gallery would cost as much as this. The real question to be answered is what strategy should be worked out for the continuing development and support of the national art collections.

#### EDUCATION

### Bright Future for Awards

MISGIVINGS about the future of the Council for National Academic Awards are disappearing fast. During the four years since the council was established as an autonomous body, the number of students on CNAA degree courses has gone up and up. As indicated in the council's report for 1967-68, 6,343 new students enrolled in September 1968—an increase of 37 per cent over the figure for the previous year. This brings the total number of students attending CNAA first and higher degree courses to 15,656 compared with 10,687 in 1966-67. More than 1,011 degrees were awarded during the year, of which 104 went to students at the four polytechnics—Borough, Northern, Regent and Woolwich. No information is available on the number of failures, but this will no doubt be remedied later by the Department of Education and Science.