



Woburn Square, London. A photograph taken in August 1968.

At the time of the release of the Martin plan in 1959, there was no formal protest either from the amenity bodies or from Convocation. The Lasdun plans themselves have been detailed since 1960. Late in the day, a group of university teachers backed by more than 1,000 students was organized to collect the signatures of fifty graduates needed for an extraordinary meeting of Convocation. They were supported by Sir John Summerson, the expert on Georgian architecture, and the joint committee of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, the Georgian Group and the Victorian Society. The arguments at the meeting last week were based on the architectural merit of the square. Although nobody criticized the intrinsic merit of the Lasdun design, it was argued that the square is one of the few remaining Georgian squares in Bloomsbury, and that it should be saved by rebuilding behind the present facades. It was argued that the preservation of architecturally significant areas has become easier in the ten years since the Martin plan was published, chiefly because of the Civic Amenities Act and the latest Town and Country Planning Act.

It is questionable whether the university would really have had to alter its plans if Convocation had voted the other way. The protest in any case came too late, but it did at least succeed in bringing several hundred members of Convocation together for a discussion of a subject that is becoming increasingly more important. Certainly the university will have to think more carefully about its future plans for expansion in Bloomsbury. It may even be persuaded that there is a case for moving the administration out of central London. Like many local authorities, it will certainly have to look very carefully at the re-usability of old buildings—a subject about which there is still much to learn. While the university pleaded last week that the refurbishing of the existing houses in Woburn Square would only have provided about a third of the room of the Lasdun buildings, there seems to be no clear reason why the houses should not have been adapted for some of the accommodation so desperately needed by the two institutes.

Parliament in Britain

by our Parliamentary Correspondent

Chemical and Biological Warfare

THE Federal German Government supports research into protective measures against biological and chemical warfare. Mr Michael Stewart, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, confirming this, said he had no reason to believe that any manufacture of weapons was involved so that there was no breach of the 1954 Brussels Treaty. Mr Stewart rejected a suggestion that the British Government should unilaterally adopt the proposals on chemical and biological disarmament put forward at the Geneva conference last year—his aim was for multilateral action by international agreement, he said. (Written answer, February 17.)

Civil Service

MRS JUDITH HART, the Paymaster General, produced a list of figures giving the number of qualified scientists and engineers employed in government research laboratories at the beginning of 1969. There are 182 in the Road Research Laboratory, 488 in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, 1,425 in the Ministry of Defence and 1,900 in the Ministry of Technology laboratories. (Written answer, February 17.)

Gas Centrifuge

THE Prime Minister declared himself unworried that the collaboration between the British, German and Dutch Governments on the use of the gas centrifuge process for uranium enrichment could lead to the proliferation of nuclear weapons. He added that the Ministers of Technology and Foreign Affairs have been working closely together on this development and that he himself had been very much concerned with it since he had learned "two years ago" of the British breakthrough in making the process cheaper. (Oral answer, February 18.)

Space Activities

SCIENTIFIC research in space is the responsibility of the Department of Education and Science and, despite the existence of a new space division set up by the Ministry of Technology, the Prime Minister sees no reason to transfer the responsibility. He thought it right that "celestial activities are related to terrestrial responsibilities of Ministers" and that pure research in space should be controlled by the minister responsible for research councils. (Oral answer, February 20.)

Concorde

REPLYING to questions about the technical reasons for the delay in the Concorde project, the Minister of Technology, Mr A. Wedgwood Benn, said that the areas in which difficulties occurred included the air conditioning system, the droop-nose mechanism, the electrical generating system, the gas turbine starter, the inertial navigation system, the landing gear and braking system and the powered flying control system. The setback to the target date for airline service, which is now 1973, was caused partly by delays to the prototypes and partly by a reassessment of the time-scale allowing for the introduction of design changes. (Written answer, February 20.)