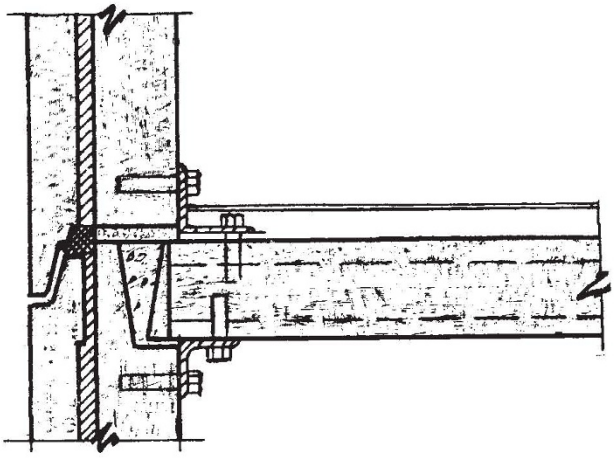
The GLC expects that the work will be easy to carry out. The advantage of the type of anchor fixing used is that the holes are cleanly and precisely drilled to the correct depth where required with little noise and with practically no damage to decorations.

The estimated cost of strengthening the twenty-nine blocks is £750 a flat, and the bill for the whole exercise of removing gas, providing and installing electrical appliances, and strengthening, is expected to approach



Junction of floor and wall, showing the type of strengthening brackets which are to be fitted.

£1·5 million for these blocks alone. The GLC is hoping that the Government will provide at least 50 per cent of its total costs, but this may be wishful thinking if all the other councils with blocks of the Ronan Point type or similar start making claims. It is also not clear whether the GLC's method will be suitable for blocks having a different arrangement of walls on plan, whether of the Taylor Woodrow Anglian construction (like Ronan Point and the GLC blocks) or of some other large panel system. The GLC advises that "each block must be treated as an individual case".

GAS

Problems of Conversion

THE gas industry is perhaps a surprising candidate for the title of the fastest growing business in Britain. But within the next two to three years, gas sales in Britain should double—and double again in the two to three years after that. "This is a rate of expansion for a basic industry almost unprecedented in post-war Europe", says Mr L. W. Andrew, director of the Gas Council research, development and testing establishment at Watson House in west London. Natural gas from the North Sea, though it has not been the only reason for the surge in demand, is certainly the only way of meeting it, and the conversion of Britain's 25 to 30 million appliances is going ahead as fast as possible. Gas men tend to get lyrical about methane ("It's a beautiful gas", says Mr Andrew), but burning it in existing equipment calls for a good deal of ingenious conversion.

The principal drawback is that natural gas will not burn well in the non-aerated burners which have been the mainstay of the industry's expansion over the past ten years. In this kind of burner, gas simply issues from a jet and burns. Because no air is drawn into the barrel of the burner, it burns quietly and keeps clean, which saves on maintenance costs. Why it works is something of a puzzle, but one that it has become important to solve. Nobody has yet devised an entirely satisfactory non-aerated burner for natural gas, although there are now several designs which may fill the bill. One of the most interesting is the matrix burner, developed at the British Petroleum Research Centre at Sunbury on Thames. This consists of a bundle of parallel tubes with their ends formed into hexagons which fit together like a honeycomb. Gas emerges from the burner through slits left between the neighbouring hexagons and mixes with air which comes through the tubes themselves. The burner is quiet and apparently efficient, but needs a chimney to draw air through it.

But the main problem in converting to natural gas is simply the scale of the task. Of the 25–30 million appliances to be converted, only 6 million are still in production. The manufacturers have agreed to supply conversion sets for another 14·5 million appliances which have been out of production for less than fifteen years, and for a few more which, though older, are still in use in sufficiently large numbers to justify it. Appliances even older than this—some seem to have been designed to last for ever—also have to be converted by the area gas boards. In extreme cases, where conversion is impossible or unreasonably expensive, the gas boards will replace the appliance with a modern one, free of charge. The task of Watson House is to approve the conversions worked out by the manufacturers, and to prepare detailed instructions so that the gas fitters employed by the area gas boards can make the conversions as quickly and reliably as possible. The general principle is to achieve exact parity of performance before and after conversion, though this may not always be possible. With 7,500 different types of appliance to convert, the job is a vast one. "In two years' time", Mr A. E. Sharman of Watson House observes cheerfully, "we'll be converting each year as many appliances as the Dutch converted in their entire programme". By that time, everybody hopes that the cost of conversion, expected to run at about £30 a household, will be near target. At the moment, each house is costing about £5 more than it should; but labour is a very large element in the costs, and should fall as fitters become more experienced.

MEDICINE

New Regius Professor

DR RICHARD DOLL, deputy director of the Medical Research Council's Clinical Research Centre and director of the MRC Statistical Research Unit since 1961, has been appointed Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford. He succeeds Sir George Pickering, who has retired to be master of Pembroke College. The director of the MRC Statistical Research Unit with a particular interest in epidemiology may not at first sight seem the obvious choice for the Regius chair of medicine at Oxford. But quite apart from any particular bond of kinship which the Prime Minister—who formally