

because of the inability of the National Health Service to cope with the volume of demand for abortions, and either the scale of their turnover or the volume of their profits is seen by some to reflect on the public standing of the medical profession. In these circumstances, it is hard to avoid the impression that Dr Tarnesby has been made a scapegoat for the private abortionists, who are acting within the law and beyond the reach of the General Medical Council.

There seems to be a considerable difference between the number of abortions that are sought and the number that the medical profession is inclined to permit. The British Medical Association has declared itself opposed to the social clause of the Abortion Act, passed by Parliament in 1967, and a dangerous gap has opened between doctors' beliefs and their patients' wishes. In this situation, it seems hardly appropriate that there should be only two lay members out of eighteen on the disciplinary committee of the General

Medical Council. With social issues, such as abortion, and the problems raised by new clinical techniques, there is likely to be an increasing number of cases where public opinion and medical opinion as to the best interests of the community will take separate courses.

This has certainly been the case in the past. It may not be too uncharitable to recall that in 1887 the General Medical Council struck off the register a doctor, H. A. Allbutt, whose offence was to publish a pamphlet advocating contraception, and from then until the 1920s much of the medical profession helped to prevent the public having access to contraceptive techniques just as some sections of the profession are now resisting the implementation of the Abortion Act. Conflict between the public interest and that of the medical profession is a serious risk, and it is by no means certain that the General Medical Council should be placed in the position of having to seem to serve two masters.

Watch for the Post-splashdown Backlash

It was once unkindly said of C. P. Snow that he was "known to scientists as a great novelist and to novelists as a great scientist". How true is it of the Apollo 11 mission that it is "known to scientists as a great public exhibition and to the public as a great scientific expedition"? As was pointed out last week in *Nature*, Dr Thomas Paine has carefully not associated scientific benefits too closely with NASA's programme. One fears, however, that the message may not have got through clearly enough to the world at large. When President Kennedy made his Moon speech in 1961, the reasons for the journey were not spelt out in detail, but there can be no doubt that a large number of United States taxpayers thought it was to be a scientific mission. As things have turned out, the first landing has proved a fantastic technological achievement, but what matters is that they got there, not what they did.

Nevertheless it is still implied, notably in glossy handouts, that the series is basically to learn about the Moon, its origin, inside and composition. It is not usually put quite as bluntly as that—there is a tendency for the objectives to be surrounded with a bubble bath of graduation ceremony prose about Man and the Universe. Even the latest book on planetary interiors, barely out, has an article on the lunar sample programme by a NASA author starting: "One of the most exciting scientific programs of the twentieth century is the landing of the first astronauts on the moon and their subsequent return with samples". So it must be reckoned that many people, and not exclusively United States citizens, may still suffer from misapprehensions about the role of science in Moon exploration.

This would be unfortunate, for there is a danger that a serious reaction could now set in, leading to scepticism about the value of this and many other enterprises in

which science is involved. It was transparently obvious, once Armstrong and Aldrin set foot on the Moon, that this was an historic moment of the highest order but not very high level science. The solemn reading of a plaque, the depositing of microdot messages (for some future microdot reader to interpret?), a strangely drawn-out attempt to erect the Stars and Stripes (so that a TV commentator explained that this was an experiment on the strength of lunar soil) and an appearance by President Nixon who, from his oval box, looked rather like King George V looking over a fishing scene on a Pitcairn Island stamp—the plain fact is that this was not science, and it was not claimed to be.

Later missions will have an increasing scientific content, but there may have been some anticlimax already. The seismometers are said to be overheating and the rocks are bound to harbour more disappointments and mysteries than breakthroughs. Will the space scientists be attacked by an indignant public when they fail to produce new theories? Could an angry backlash develop to the effect that "we didn't pay billions of dollars for inconclusive results"? Ill-conceived though such a backlash would be, it could be serious and might not be restricted to the United States.

This has not yet happened. There are obvious temptations in pessimism, but the signs are not auspicious. "Moon rock is rather ordinary" has already been a headline—not a great encouragement to a public very much aware of NASA's budget and of the size of poverty programmes, overseas aid and funds for other projects. Scientists are going to need to be fully acquainted with the scope and limitations of the scientific lunar work and to be able to say firmly that NASA's budget must not be counted expenditure on science.