

led by Mr Michael Thomson, a transport economist at the London School of Economics (*Motorways in London*, Duckworth: London, 50s). The team of ten specialists was asked last January by the London Amenity and Transport Association—an organization representing many civic and amenity groups—to appraise the council's plans and to "make such assessment as is possible taking account of the wider transport implications and the effects on environment, housing, town planning and other relevant matters". It is on these wider issues that the team largely takes issue with the GLC.

The network proposed by the GLC consists broadly of four ring roads (the innermost being Ringway 1, formerly known as the Motorway Box) and twelve radial roads all of motorway standard or thereabouts. Understandably, the scheme has already led to howls of protest on the grounds of its expense, its disruption of housing and its effect on the character of life in London. The working party says that the GLC has considered London's transport problem only as a road building operation, and has consequently ignored the effects of more roads on public transport users, on the environment and on accidents. It complains that the GLC has done no more than mention proposals for solving the transport problem by devices such as parking control, parking charges, traffic restrictions or road pricing; the staggering of shopping and working hours; simultaneous improvements in the public transport system and facilities for pedestrians; and creation of environmental areas protected from traffic nuisance—all factors that the team believes must accompany any programme for new roads. According to the team, the motorways will "generate a volume of traffic some 70 to 100 per cent greater than would otherwise materialize. The existing roads would in general be more congested than they are today, and the levels of traffic in most residential and shopping streets would be greatly increased; there would be widespread deterioration in the environment, higher fares and falling quality of service on the buses and the underground, and a serious rise in road accidents". Except for the minority of long-distance traffic, the team believes that the traffic "would not lead to large savings in overall time for motorists, especially in Inner London where the projected motorways appear to be out of balance with the secondary road programme".

When the motorways are built, the report says that about 1 million people could find themselves living within 200 yards of a motorway, and a quarter of these could be within 200 yards of Ringway 1.

On the cost of the whole scheme, the team says that the GLC has under-estimated the cost of its programme for 1972–83, which it puts at £1,106 million; according to the report, this sum excludes expenditure on many additional works, and the final cost of the primary road network as envisaged by the GLC for the whole of London will instead be more than £2,000 million, most of which would be sought from the Ministry of Transport. The report also says that the council has exaggerated the economic benefits of the network. Ringway 3 and some of the radial roads could give good value for money, but the inner roads, and particularly Ringway 1, would give returns on capital less than the 10 per cent usually considered to be the minimum acceptable by the Ministry of Transport.

## Parliament in Britain

### Nuclear Power

MR ANTHONY WEDGWOOD BENN, Minister of Technology and Minister of Power, has now estimated the cost of the delays to the steam generating heavy water reactor at Winfrith and to the Dragon high temperature gas cooled reactor, first mentioned a few weeks ago in the report of the Atomic Energy Authority for 1968–69. The cost of rectifying the Winfrith plant, he said, was about £6,000, but the costs arising from the fuel failure could not easily be assessed and, in addition, the estimated loss in revenue amounted to about £20,000. He did, however, assure Mr Clifford Williams that the 45 per cent load factor achieved at Winfrith is satisfactory. The cost of replacing a complete set of fuel elements in the Dragon reactor was about £60,000, but because this reactor is not being used to produce electricity, there was no loss in revenue.

Mr Harold Lever, Paymaster General, also said that the prototype fast breeder reactor at Dounreay is expected to be completed at the end of 1972, and that a commercial fast reactor could be ordered to come into operation at the end of the 1970s. Mr G. Elfed Davies had drawn attention to the report of the Atomic Energy Authority which had mentioned delays at Dounreay, but Mr Lever said that these were caused by difficulties in welding the biological shield roof, and were not connected with the fast reactor system.

Mr Lever also refused to give an undertaking that the government would withhold permission to build any more nuclear power stations until the advanced gas cooled reactor system had been operated long enough for its running costs to be determined. He said that the government is already satisfied that the AGR will generate base load electricity at lower cost than conventional stations and if permission were withheld for the construction of further AGRs this would delay both the reduction of electricity costs and the further development of nuclear power. (Written answers, October 17 and 20.)

### Sodium Fluoride

A number of questions about the addition of sodium fluoride to drinking water provoked heated exchanges between Mr Richard Crossman, Secretary of State for Social Services, and some members of parliament. Mr J. Rankin asked why those who have no teeth should be made to drink fluoridated water, and Mr John Biggs Davison said that because conscientious objection to vaccination has been respected, is it right that individuals should be subjected unwillingly to this form of compulsory medication? Mr Crossman said that he strongly supports adjusting the level of fluoride in drinking water as a safe and effective way of reducing the incidence of dental decay. He said that he does not regard fluoridation of drinking water as medication because it would prevent hundreds of thousands of cases of dental decay, and that it is simply a case of adding a little more where water is deficient in fluoride to get the content exactly right. He hopes that local authorities will take action, but it is disconcerting to see how a very small group can deliberately spread misinformation and lies to deter an important social reform. Mr Rankin said that he was not satisfied with Mr Crossman's replies, and gave notice that he would raise the matter again at the earliest possible moment. (Oral answers, October 20.)