

go against the Euratom treaty, the commission has to communicate its observations to the Euratom states concerned within a month. This seems to be what has now happened. Although there is no official news of what the objections are, one possibility is that the commission is worried that Britain would be able to prevent members of the Community not in the centrifuge collaboration from access to the uranium. Under the draft agreement there is to be a joint committee with members from Britain, the Netherlands and West Germany to deal with relationships with other states, but the commission must feel that this is not enough to safeguard the interests of the Community as a whole.

The point of the centrifuge method is that it ought to be possible to produce enriched uranium at a price comparable with what the US Atomic Energy Commission charges—\$26 per kg of separative work. Precisely what the selling price is likely to be has not been made known, and all that Mr Benn will say is that it will be competitive with the American product. At present, all the members of the European Community are supplied from the United States, with the exception of France which operates a gaseous diffusion plant. Part of the trouble seems to be that the Community is at present discussing arrangements for the supply of enriched uranium in the future and is bound to be disturbed with a *fait accompli* by two of its members.

Although the centrifuge has small beginnings—an aim of 50 tonnes of separative work in 1972—what the collaboration is working towards is the 15,000 tonnes which is the predicted European requirement by 1980. With this target in view, the commission is hardly likely to torpedo the project once there is assurance that it can be integrated into a European framework, and the Belgians and Italians have already been interested in joining. Once again, like the agreement to rescue Euratom early in December (see *Nature*, 224, 1047; 1969), the move is as likely as not a political decision, and is another indication that Europe's nuclear policy is hardly likely to be settled until the question of British entry to the Community is decided one way or the other.

#### CERN ACCELERATOR

### When is the Last Bus?

PROSPECTS for the proposed 300 GeV CERN accelerator are starting to look rather bleak. The West German Government finally called off the ministerial meeting scheduled to be held in Geneva last week after a period of tough talking between the German and Belgian Governments over the siting of the accelerator. Little progress seems to have been made in quelling the West German Government's conviction that it should now put pressure on its European partners for a fairer deal in joint scientific ventures, and there seems little chance that any of the other five participants to the project will allow the siting of the project to be determined by anything resembling strong-arm tactics.

One theory, which has made its way into print in the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir*, is that the West German Government has been re-evaluating the project and has found it too expensive. This would explain the odd timing of the announcement that the Federal Government will reconsider its participation if the West German site near Munster was not selected at the December meeting of the CERN Council. Some doubts

have, in any case, been expressed about the suitability of the German site. Another view is that the French Government has decided to back the Belgian site in return for the purchase of Mirage aircraft by the Belgian Government, but in such a fluid situation the wildest speculations can easily gain a hold.

In one sense the British Government's decision to steer clear of the project may be held as the primary cause of the impasse, placing a heavier financial burden on each of the other governments and so elevating the importance of the location. In another sense, however, British participation would have added another arm to the multilateral tug of war, and the British Government may be feeling that it made the best decision after all.

#### FABIAN SOCIETY

### Priorities in Education

by our Education Correspondent

THE Department of Education and Science should publish a green paper to stimulate discussion about the possibilities that exist at every level of education and their financial consequences. This, according to a pamphlet published by the Fabian Society, would provide a basis for informed discussion about priorities in education, and would help in the formulation of a national plan on the subject. The authors of the pamphlet strongly criticize the British Government for attacking the problem of expansion in education on a piecemeal basis and, in turn, they call for rapid expansion of nursery education and for more provision for further education of students leaving school at the age of sixteen.

The pamphlet is a brave attempt to assess priorities in education, and it also attempts to calculate the costs of alternative policies. The authors argue that if existing policies are continued, the share of the gross national product devoted to education will grow from the present 5.7 per cent to about 8 per cent in 1980, but if the policies that they recommend are adopted, then the figure would be about 9 per cent. This estimate is based on proposals for universal nursery education, the employment of teachers' aides in primary schools, as suggested in the Plowden Report, fully comprehensive education in secondary schools, a major expansion of further education and reorganization of higher education.

As far as higher education is concerned, the authors of the pamphlet argue that the Robbins committee grossly underestimated the likely demand for higher education. The major problem, they argue, is to increase the number of students and still maintain the existing standards of building and the staff/student ratio. The pamphlet calls for a greater variety of full and part time courses in the universities, and suggests that the main developments of this kind are at present occurring in the polytechnics. Boosting the polytechnics is therefore right in the short term, but "over a period of time, the separation of institutions of higher education into distinct classes could have most undesirable results". The authors argue that because the polytechnics devote a lower proportion of their resources to research, they offer fewer senior posts, and that the facilities provided for their students are inferior to those provided by the universities. If this