

## Parliament in Britain

### Space Programme

THE total expenditure on national space projects since 1966 has amounted to £56.6 million, and a further £62.4 million is being spent on international projects. These figures, which were given by Mr Neil Carmichael, joint Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Technology, were not greeted with much enthusiasm by Mr Arthur Palmer or Mr David Price, however. Mr Palmer thought that the British space effort is not as large as it should be, and Mr Price said that over the last ten years the space programme has suffered from a lack of defined commercial and technical mission; the money, he said, has been dissipated by both governments. Mr Carmichael replied that the government is now trying to put money only into commercially viable projects, and that if Britain went into space research in a really big way the costs would be quite out of keeping with the country's industrial potential.

Mr Carmichael said later that the government has recently received the final draft of the report of the working group for a European Telecommunications Satellite, but although Britain has already declared its willingness, in principle, to participate in such a programme, a final decision will not be taken until the European Conference on Posts and Communications and the European Broadcasting Union have had a chance to comment. (Oral answers, March 23.)

### Concorde

THE Concorde prototype 002 will shortly be flying at supersonic speeds, and its testing programme will later be extended to speeds of Mach 2. This announcement was made by Mr Anthony Wedgwood Benn, but neither he nor Mr Neil Carmichael could give definite answers about the economics of the project. Mr Benn said that £410 million out of the total estimated development expenditure of £730 million has already been spent, but he could not say when the provisional orders for the aircraft will become firm orders. That, he said, will depend on the results of the supersonic trials.

Mr Neil Carmichael said that Concorde is not expected to be any more noisy than conventional jets during take-off and landing when the proper engines are fitted—the engines fitted at the moment will not be used for landing and take-off at international airports. Mr Paroe asked whether any estimate could be made of the likely additional passenger fare which will be necessary to cover the running costs of Concorde, but Mr Carmichael said that would be up to the airlines to decide and no estimate could yet be made of the likely costs of the aircraft. (Oral answers, March 23.)

### Conservation

MR JOHN CORDLE asked the Minister of Housing and Local Government how much the government is spending on conservation this year. Mr Greenwood replied that his department has made grants of £111,000 to the Centre for Environmental Studies, £40,000 to the Restoration of Churches Fund, and £15,000 to the Keep Britain Tidy organization. In addition, the Countryside Commission is directly financed by the Department of Housing and Local Government, and its estimated expenditure for 1969–70 is £309,000. Individual grants for the repair and upkeep of historic buildings are expected to add a further £500,000 to the bill. (Written answers, March 26.)

## Miscellaneous Intelligence

NOAH'S ark has been discovered rather earlier this year than usual, but its timbers seem to hold more canards than doves of peace. According to the gospel of the *Guardian*, wood brought back from Mount Ararat by M. Fernand Navarra has been dated at about AD 560 by radiocarbon tests performed in the University of Pennsylvania and in Britain. But the testament of the Clip Sheet (University of California) has it that another fragment provided by M. Navarra has been dated at between 4,000 and 5,000 years old by tests in Madrid and Paris. It seems that some parts of the ark are hoarier than others.

THE two departments mainly concerned with the British space programme are both grumbling over their press though for different reasons. The Science Research Council is cross because its most interesting satellite package to date (UK-5) has been publicized without its authorization, through its own injudicious advertisement for staff in a daily newspaper.

The space division of Mintech is complaining (see, for example, this issue, page 89) because a Japanese "orbiting tennis-ball" has received more attention than the first successful flight (second attempt) of the British Black Arrow space launcher which flew in March but orbited nothing.

What both bodies fail to appreciate is that official presentation of the British space programme has always been lamentable and that results are in direct relation to the amount of information provided. Both, obviously, have much to learn from the Japanese, such as the etiquette that space officials resign when a payload fails to get into orbit.

"WATER can be used for drinking", "Laws must be reasonable", and "Motor vehicles are an example of mobile air pollution" are only three of the jewels of wisdom set to bedazzle the public eye in the latest report of the World Health Organization (*National Environmental Health Programmes*, WHO, 1970).

THE use of hyphenated surnames as a mark of superior lineage may be a harmless piece of snobbery in humans, but its excrescences seem to swell to ever more absurd proportions in descending the evolutionary tree. The names given to prize dogs and racehorses must make geneticists sometimes wonder why their art deserves such cruel mockery, but it is the plant breeders who reduce the Mendelian craft to a polyglot parody of Debrett. In Gertrude Stein's day a rose was a rose was a rose. Now the flower is more likely to be Phalaenopsis Zada 'Mont Millais' (San Songer × Doris) or even an *Odontioda Ingera* 'Lyoth Galaxy' (Odm. Incana 'Lyoth Jubilee' × Oda. Gera)—monstrosities of nomenclature that would smell sweeter by any other name.

A LEAFLET published by the Great Boston Chapter of the Massachusetts Heart Association will prick the conscience of every mother. Advising how to set good examples to one's children that will reduce the risks of a coronary in later life, the leaflet asks "Will they remember your tasty meals, low in saturated fats and cholesterol?"