

Britain and in France may think that the Concorde is now safer than a few weeks ago, but this is by no means a certain calculation—Mr Heath, after all, has made all kinds of commitments about the level of public expenditure which he is likely to be anxious to keep. There is, however, a chance that a Conservative government, with the old East of Suez Adam on its back, and with fond memories of the now-abandoned TSR2 as well, may find itself fanning new life into aircraft development projects. This is a temptation that Mr Heath and his new men would be well advised to resist, at least in the simple form in which it is likely to be put to them. At this stage in the industrial history of Britain, the need for military aircraft cannot possibly be held to justify an aircraft industry which costs the best part of £300 million a year. The only acceptable objective would be the building up of an aircraft industry able once more to sell ordinary aircraft to ordinary money conscious airlines. But such a prospect is only attainable if there is a market in which aircraft can be sold, and this in turn for Britain must imply the making of a market in Europe by a process of consultation with other European countries, some with manufacturing ambitions of their own.

One way or another, the relationship between British technology and mainland technology is certain to be an important preoccupation in the months ahead. As it happens, this is also a situation in which the obvious courses of action may not in the long run be sufficient. Indeed, the opportunities for technical collaboration which now present themselves within the European Economic Community are plainly but transitional devices. Within the framework of the Aigran committees, splendid though their work may be, the objective is somehow to make sure that none of the participating countries will be left out of new technical developments—computers and telecommunications, for example. Some of the projects being talked of will no doubt be valuable means of broadening the base of European technology in some important sectors, but it is, of course, entirely undesirable that the end-point of the process should be a state of affairs in which all members of the EEC, six or more of them as there may be, should be equally engaged in technology of all kinds. The objective should not be similarity but diversity—members should be prepared to see their fellows specialize in some kinds of technology without feeling bound to follow suit. Only in such a way will there be a market in Europe big enough to support technological innovation. The unwillingness of European countries so far to buy their neighbours' aircraft or to rely on their neighbours for such things as the development of breeder reactors are signs of how much remains to be done before Europe can be thought of as a technological community. The duplication of research and development programmes in nuclear energy is a monumental waste of resources. Mr Heath's government can be counted upon to pursue the European connexion with the greatest diligence, and it will be an extra commendation to the

rest of Europe if it can begin working out the ways in which the European market for new technology can be made more dynamic and more resilient. An agreement among European governments that in the spending of public money, they will treat the products of all European companies on an equal basis would be a good beginning. Luckily this is another field in which the new government's abhorrence of direct intervention in technical development may push it in the right direction.

In technology, then, Mr Geoffrey Rippon, the new minister, may find himself pushed by the party doctrine in directions which are more or less desirable. Mrs Margaret Thatcher at the Department of Education and Science, who is a sensible woman, is nevertheless more likely to find herself swimming against the tide. The trouble, of course, is that the Conservative Party is even more impatient than the Labour Party has been in the past few years that the educational system should be made somehow to yield practical and even monetary benefits. Moreover, the Conservatives are wedded to what seems to them to be the pursuit of excellence in education without quite knowing what that means. The arrival of the new government will no doubt bring rejoicing to the grammar and the direct grant schools, but there is a serious danger that, in the process, the need somehow to train a large proportion of the British population in skills ancient and modern may be neglected. However much the new government may be out of sympathy with the concept of comprehensive education—synonymous with ordinary high school education to most other industrialized nations—it will be a great misdemeanour if it turns vindictive against the comprehensive schools which have sprouted in the past few years. Excellence is a fine ideal, already well catered for in Britain. There is still a crying need for mass education.

The polytechnics will be another of Mrs Thatcher's awkward inheritances. Only a little hindsight is needed to show how muddled was the Labour government's devotion to its concept of a binary system of higher education. The way in which the polytechnics have been organized suggests that they will be unable to recruit the staff they need to do the job expected of

IN an article on page 198 of the April 18, 1970, edition of *Nature*, a reference was made to "the way in which the Commissioners of the Church of England used to be attacked for their ownership of brothels". We should like to make it clear that this was intended as a reference to the attacks which were in fact made and not as an allegation that the Church Commissioners are, or ever have been, brothel landlords, or that they have failed to exercise the highest standards in the management of their properties with a view to preventing any kind of abuse. If the article in question has been read as containing such an allegation, we withdraw it unconditionally and apologize to the Church Commissioners.