

PARTY CONFERENCES

Back Seats Again

THE season for political party conferences has come round again, but signs of new thinking from the grass roots of the three main political parties are unlikely to find their way to the conference floor—it is too soon after the general election for that. And, by the same token, issues of science policy are notably few and far between on the conference agendas.

The chief item of interest, in the circumstances, is the appearance of Mr John Davies, the new Minister of Technology, in a debate on government and industry. The debate is due to take place at the Conservative Party Conference in Blackpool on October 8, and it will centre on a motion by the South Nottingham Conservative Association "calling for a stronger role for private business in the national economy". Mr Davies's reply to the debate should give him his first opportunity to outline his thinking on the role of the Ministry of Technology in industry, and on the green paper on government research, published by the Labour government. The government is already pledged to reduce government intervention in industry, and it will be no surprise to see Mr Davies preside over the demise of a ministry which has always been something of a *bête noire* to the Conservative party.

On education, Mrs M. E. Thatcher will find herself replying to a motion in which she is congratulated on withdrawing the compulsion for local education authorities to submit schemes for comprehensive secondary education. But it will be interesting to see whether she has yet been able to coordinate her policy on the expansion of higher education.

While the Conservative Party Conference promises to be something of a showpiece, in which new ministers are presented to the rest of the party, the Liberals and the Labour party will be more concerned with analysing what went wrong in the election campaign. But there is every sign, however, that science policy will not take a back seat in politics for too long—the popular concern over pollution has found its way into a motion to be debated at the Conservative conference, and a motion submitted to the Labour conference by Nottingham Central Labour Party includes a comprehensive list of suggestions for pollution control. The debate at the Conservative conference will give Mr Peter Walker a chance to say what he plans to do.

ASTRONOMY

CERN lends a Hand

AN agreement was signed in Geneva last week between the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) and the European Southern Observatory (ESO) for collaboration in the design and construction of a 3.6 m conventional telescope, third in size only to that at Palomar, California, and that under construction in the Crimea. The telescope, costing about £8 million, will become the chief research instrument of the ESO and will be situated at the site of the existing observatory at La Silla in Chile, where it is expected to start operating by 1976.

A new division is to be set up at CERN comprised of 30 to 40 astronomers and engineers working under the head of the telescope division of ESO, Dr S. Laustsen.



The ESO observatory at La Silla, Chile. The new telescope will be situated on the mound in the top right of the picture.

Although the division will be autonomous with its own budget the idea is that it should share in the support facilities of CERN and draw on the experience of the 16 year old nuclear laboratory in the design and construction of large installations.

The three existing telescopes at the ESO in Chile, which have been operating since 1967, are manned by a permanent staff of about ten astronomers together with a regular complement of visiting astronomers from the six member states of ESO, namely Belgium, Denmark, France, West Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden. All these countries are also members of CERN. A 1 m Schmidt telescope is also being installed at the ESO, La Silla, comparable with the Palomar Schmidt used for sky survey work, and is expected to be in operation by the middle of 1971.

The site in Chile, selected by both the ESO and the American Southern Observatory, was chosen originally for the favourable weather conditions and because ESO astronomers were particularly interested in celestial objects visible only in the southern hemisphere. The link-up with CERN may be seen as giving substance to the view that a better understanding of high energy physics will as likely as not come from astronomy

COMPUTERS

Green Light for New Giant

THE merger between the computing interests of Honeywell and General Electric (USA), which has just been given the green light, produces an international computer giant second only to IBM. The combine expects to reach a 10 per cent share of the world wide computer market compared with 70 per cent for IBM. General Electric is represented in the United Kingdom by its subsidiary, GEIS Ltd, which has considerable experience in time-sharing and information services but no manufacturing capabilities in its own right. Honeywell Ltd is the much larger subsidiary, with a plant at Newhouse in Scotland, and it is strong in small and medium scale computers. The new company Honeywell Information Services Ltd, formed by the amalgamation of the two subsidiaries, will add the large scale systems made by