

nature of the group of citizens most inclined to such migration, a kind of self-perpetuating population boom in the erstwhile virgin lands.

ENGLISH CHANNEL

A New Underground Movement

ONCE again the British and French governments have a set of plans for a Channel tunnel to think about. The latest proposals for making final economic studies and paying for the construction of the still putative tunnel have come from a large international consortium which consists chiefly of banking companies but also includes the Channel Tunnel Co. Ltd and the French National Railways. The consortium was created this year by a merger among three smaller groups which had been planning for a tunnel competitively but had gradually been sinking their differences since their separate schemes were rejected in 1968.

What happens next is a series of governmental decisions, and the only certainty is that they are going to take a long time. First, ministers from Britain and France will discuss the new proposals, whose details have not been made public. If the proposals are acceptable, the consortium will go ahead with a study of the techniques and costs of building the tunnel and a reassessment of the traffic to be expected. This stage may not be reached until next year, and will last for at least two years, at the end of which the two governments will again ponder the evidence and decide whether the tunnel is to be built. With four or five years allowed for construction, there could be no tunnel before 1977 at the earliest.

Plans revealed so far by the Ministry of Transport provide for an electrified railway tunnel running between terminals near Cheriton in Kent and near Calais on the French side. Discussion at present centres on the financial arrangements—it is intended, for example, that the consortium will supervise and pay for the construction, and that the tunnel will be operated by a public organization which will remunerate the consortium, but the details of the remuneration procedure have yet to be agreed. The total cost of the enterprise was estimated in 1966 to be £200 million; how far the consortium has had to increase this figure is not yet known.

Alternative links across the Channel, such as a bridge or a dam, have officially been ruled out, so that in theory the two governments have only to decide whether the new proposals make financial sense and not whether something completely different would be better. Those who dispute the merits of boring—including presumably the twenty or so people who designed dams for a *Nature* competition (220, 1168; 1968)—do have several years in which to organize subversive activities; but it now seems that the consortium will get the prize if anybody does at all. The member companies are, from Britain: the Channel Tunnel Co. Ltd; Morgan Grenfell & Co. Ltd; Robert Fleming & Co. Ltd; Hill, Samuel & Co. Ltd; Kleinwort, Benson Ltd; and S. G. Warburg & Co. Ltd; from France: ten companies led by the Compagnie Financière de Suez; Compagnie du Nord; Banque Louis-Dreyfus and Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas, together with the French National Railways; from the United States: several investment banks whose names are to be announced later.

Parliament in Britain

Atomic Energy Authority

MR GEOFFREY RIPPON, Minister of Technology, announced that a bill to transfer the production activities of the Atomic Energy Authority to a nuclear fuel company and a radiochemical company will be introduced after the summer recess. Setting up a nuclear fuel company was one of the provisions of the Atomic Energy Authority bill which was awaiting its third reading when the last Parliament was dissolved. (Written answers, July 23.)

Cervical Smear Tests

THE Health Education Council has recently made a loan of £2,000 to the Women's National Cancer Control Campaign, and it is ready to give further help if necessary. The loan, announced by Mr Michael Allison, Under Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Services, will enable the Women's National Cancer Control Campaign to carry on its campaign to encourage women to have cervical smear tests. The WNCCC was in danger of closing because of lack of funds. (Oral answers, July 20.)

Polytechnics

It seems that the government has no intention of changing the function of the polytechnics. Asked to state the government's policy towards the polytechnics, Mrs Margaret Thatcher, Secretary of State for Education and Science, said that the government endorses the role for them that was outlined in the White Paper of May 1966. (Written answers, July 23.)

Environmental Pollution

THE increase of £4,000 in the provision for the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution prompted a wide-ranging debate on the environment during discussion of the Consolidated Fund bill. Mr Eldon Griffiths, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, said that he broadly welcomed the proposals contained in the White Paper on the environment which was published by the Labour Government, and that the Royal Commission will continue with its work. Mr Griffiths did not, however, commit himself on the question of central control of water pollution, and he said that the government regretfully must take measures to overcome the shortage of smokeless fuels. By 1973 there will be no manufacture of gas coke, and until other supplies of smokeless fuel are sufficient to meet the demand, new smoke control orders will only be accepted by the Department of Housing and Local Government if they are submitted by authorities in heavily polluted areas. (Debate, July 21.)

Medical Schools

MRS MARGARET THATCHER, Secretary of State for Education and Science, said that the government hopes to make between 2,700 and 3,700 additional pre-clinical places available in British medical schools by 1975. In 1968-69 there were 6,017 pre-clinical and 7,024 clinical training places in medical schools in Britain. She also said, in reply to a later question from Mr Tam Dalyell, that the government has as yet no statement to make on the open university. (Written answers, July 20.)