

Twenty-Fourth Party Congress (now scheduled for next spring), and on the threshold of a five year plan. If the planning authorities draft their directives in accordance with the proposals which arose from the discussions at the conference, the forthcoming plan should yield results that are considerably more satisfactory than the last.

HOVERCRAFT

Hover-Over from Canada

AN overseas firm using British hovercraft patents under licence has just put its home-developed hovercraft on the English market. The specially formed company, Canahover Ltd, a subsidiary of the Ottawa Bogue Electric Manufacturing Company, is currently demonstrating the Hover-Over on the Thames and a freighter version is on view at Ontario House, Charles II Street.

The Hover-Over can also be used as a two-seater sports vehicle or as an amphibious runabout. The single-seat freighter version has 600 lb. of payload available in a well behind the driver's seat and it also has a future as a seismic or general survey craft, while the two-seater could be used for waterway patrolling. The price quoted is between £2,300 and £3,000—there is some uncertainty about carriage costs from Canada—and there is no import tax.

The craft is 16 feet by 7½ feet with a 16 inch skirt of all-Canadian design. It is powered by three Rockwell 2-stroke air-cooled engines originally developed for the 'sno-mobiles' now so popular during the Canadian winter. It is very robust and will be able, it is claimed, to travel over water, mud, snow and sand. A great advantage is that this engine has a very narrow range of operating temperature—in previous small hovercraft most of the engine trouble encountered has been due to the cold-water dousing of an engine running very hot. Altogether \$2 million (Canadian) has been invested in modifying the engine over a period of two and a half years.

The Hover-Over can reach 50 knots under smooth conditions and cruises at 35 knots. It is said to be very economical of fuel. Two hundred craft have been sold in North America since it was put on the market there last spring.

Its most direct competitor on the English market is the Hoverhawk made by the East Anglian firm of Hover-Air. This has been powered in the past by a two-stroke motor-cycle engine. From the current demonstrations the Hover-Over seems marginally more manoeuvrable.

The sales drive for the Hover-Over has started in London because of its central position for marketing both in Europe and the Middle East. The company has its eye in particular on Central and Eastern European waterways, and on the oil industry's activities. All the oil companies, it is pointed out, have London offices.

Mr Griffen, Hover-Air's general manager, considers that the British hovercraft industry will have much bigger earnings in North America through selling licences and collecting royalties from North American built vehicles than in direct sales. Last winter a contract for 4,000 Hoverhawks was said to have been placed by Canadian interests.

Miscellaneous Intelligence

THE irony of the new appointment as head of Space Division at the Ministry of Technology on the translation of Mr Richard H. W. Bullock to a deputy-secretaryship could hardly be more complete. It goes to Mr A. Goodson who for the past three years has been on loan to ELDO, and what is more, as Director-General of Financial Affairs. The main thrust of the policy that Mr Bullock has been responsible for pursuing was to prove the non-credibility of ELDO and to withdraw Britain's financial support from it. Can this appointment be taken as the climax of the policy's success?

THE story of how an ornithological fraud of almost Piltown dimensions was foisted on British scientists in the 1900s with effects to this day is revealed in the current issue of *British Birds*. 595 rare bird species that had never before been recorded in Britain were reported over a period of years by a Sussex taxidermist called Bristow. He claimed to have shot them on the Hastings coast and in spite of the extraordinary degree of coincidence involved, the 595 "Hastings Rarities" were accepted by the establishment. A number of them were even included in the 1952 definitive *Check List of the Birds of Great Britain and Ireland* on Bristow's evidence alone.

Some British bird men were increasingly suspicious of the Rarities but could not account for how Bristow had obtained fresh specimens of foreign birds. Robert Coombes now tells how he chanced to meet the man who smuggled in the birds from the Persian Gulf, the Baltic and the Mediterranean before the First World War. He was a ship's steward called Parkman, and, on a commission from his brother in England, he shot or bought wild birds at his ports of call and kept them on ice on the voyage home. There he handed them over to his brother who, he knew, disposed of them at Hastings "to a man called Bristow".

Almost equally extraordinary is the time it has taken to get the record straight. Mr Coombes learnt about the bird smuggling route in 1939, when he was importing some geese specimens from Persia, which Parkman, still on the Middle East run, cared for en route. In 1947 when Coombes was an officer of the British Ornithologists Union he mentioned the matter to the then President, Sir Norman Kinnear, who told him to keep quiet. This he has reluctantly done for another 23 years.

THE Soviet journal *Khimia I Zhizn* claims that Soviet biologists have discovered that human beings exhale a variety of obnoxious substances, including "hydrocarbons, alcohols, ammonia, formic and acetic acid, formaldehyde and acetone". It is no wonder that all the talk about cleaning up the environment seems to have had little effect.

THE prize for the most amusing scene at the meeting of the International Astronomy Union held in Brighton last week must surely go to the opening celebrations. Much to the embarrassment of the British astronomers, the band of the Coldstream Guards launched into "Rule Britannia", and about 1,000 astronomers from all over the world joined in the chorus. The astronomers were later treated to a rendering of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star".