

STUDENTS

NUS in the Public Eye

A LETTER signed by 150 university lecturers and professors and circulated on the first day of the conference of the National Union of Students ensured that student affairs received their fair share of publicity during the past week. In many respects, the views expressed in the letter are in direct contrast to the views and policies of the National Union of Students and it is therefore not surprising that the NUS conference was stimulated into passing a strongly worded resolution denouncing not only the letter, but many aspects of higher education and society as well. This debate came at the end of a conference filled not only with the familiar motions about grants and examinations, but also with a debate about the structure of higher education, centred on a closely argued document denouncing the binary system and calling for a comprehensive system of higher education.

The letter which caused uproar at the conference was chiefly the work of Professor Brian Cox of the University of Manchester, co-author of the infamous Black Papers on education, but it was also signed by 150 senior academics. It is difficult to imagine a letter more calculated to inflame the passions of the student body. It denounced not only student activists, and recommended their expulsion from the universities, but it also decried the idea that students should be brought into university and college decision-making. In effect, the letter argued for re-establishment of the teacher-pupil relationship in the universities—a concept which the NUS has consistently challenged.

The NUS's attitude to the proposed expansion of higher education was aired on the second day of the conference during a debate on the binary system. The union has always opposed the system whereby one sector of higher education, the university sector, comes under the aegis of the Department of Education and Science, while the remainder is financed and controlled through local education authorities. A document prepared by the NUS research officer and circulated before the debate gives a clear statement of the union's arguments and proposals. It argues for the establishment of a higher education commission, responsible for financing and planning all higher and further education, sharing of facilities between different education establishments, and for the establishment of comprehensive institutions of higher education—institutions providing the full range of opportunities for extended education, both full time and part time.

POLLUTION

Aware of the Danger

THE constant vigilance and planning necessary to protect London against its own waste products are adequately reflected in the Report for 1969 of the Scientific Adviser to the Greater London Council (GLC Information Centre, County Hall, 18s). Although the colour of the front cover has been changed, in most respects the report is little different from those published in the two preceding years. As before, the quality of London's air and water take pride of place, and more than half of the report is devoted to describing in detail the steps taken to preserve these amenities.

The remarkable progress made during the past decade in cleaning up the River Thames has been maintained, and even the recent council workers' strike has failed seriously to affect the generally healthy state of the river. Earlier this week a GLC spokesman claimed that the condition of the water is already back to normal, a mere two weeks after the end of the strike.

This happy situation has been achieved only by the installation and operation of costly treatment plant at the various sewage treatment works which discharge into the Thames. At Crossness sewage station, for example, two large electric motors have recently been installed to increase the speed of rotation of the sewage aeration cones so that a greater proportion of the ammonia in the effluent can be oxidized.

1969 was the first year when this system was in full operation. In spite of a breakdown which meant that for nine days sewage discharged into the Thames was only partially treated, the average effective oxygen load discharged to the river was reduced to 48 tons a day, compared with the previous best average of 73 tons a day, recorded for 1968.

No less successful has been the clean air programme pursued by local authorities in London over the past fifteen years. Smog last occurred in London in December, 1962, when daily average concentrations of 2,890 microgrammes of smoke particles and 4,450 microgrammes of sulphur dioxide per cubic metre of air were recorded. In contrast, the highest single daily averages measured in 1969 were 420 microgrammes of smoke and 880 microgrammes of sulphur dioxide per cubic metre of air.

ENTREPRENEURS

How to exploit Ideas

ROUTE 128 around Boston, Massachusetts, is almost a memorial to the American entrepreneurial spirit. Small technology-based companies have sprung up along the route like mushrooms, exploiting ideas conceived in university and defence oriented laboratories and living initially off risk capital supplied by a merchant bank or other source of finance. In Britain, there is no such complex around large university cities. Indeed, relatively few technology based businesses have been started up by scientist-entrepreneurs either from academic or business laboratories. But there is certainly no lack of demand to learn how to start and develop a successful business.

A conference taking place this weekend, under the auspices of the Institute of Physics and the Physical Society and organized in conjunction with the Confederation of British Industry, is designed specifically to help people start their own technology-based businesses. More than 100 potential entrepreneurs are taking part and the demand for places has been so great that enough applicants have already been turned away to fill another conference. The aim of the conference is to give advice and encouragement to those who have already thought about exploiting ideas which cannot easily be developed by the company or university for which they are working.

Finance is not the greatest barrier to the prospective entrepreneur—a source of risk capital can usually be found for a good idea backed up by market research and moulded into a convincing case. One part of the conference is devoted to such case preparation and