

NUCLEAR POWER

Rethinking at BNDC

THE Nuclear Power Group, one of the two consortia set up during the reorganization of the British nuclear power industry in the late 1960s, seems to be losing the competition of its twin, British Nuclear Design and Construction Ltd, in the field of steam generating heavy water reactors (SGHWR).

Although BNDC says that development work on the SGHWR will be continued, it certainly seems that the consortium's prices are not as competitive as those of the Nuclear Power Group. The NPG is, for example, very hopeful of winning the contract for the Jervis Bay project in Australia whereas the BNDC tender was not even shortlisted. Another clue to the changing attitude of BNDC towards the steam generating reactor is the consortium's decision not to compete for the Stakeness reactor contract offered by the North of Scotland Hydroelectric Board. The NPG, however, regards the Stakeness contract as vitally important because it marks the first expression of real commercial interest in the SGHWRs within the UK.

The Nuclear Power Group is also confident that the SGHWR is a particularly good export proposition because it does not require the large and sophisticated high pressure boilers which are necessary in pressurized water and boiling water reactors. The group says that as much as 85 per cent of a typical SGHWR can be constructed within the purchasing country, even if that country is not particularly advanced technologically. The design of steam generating reactors is also very flexible and higher outputs can be achieved simply by adding extra light-water tubes rather than by carrying out fundamental boiler design changes.

The decline of SGHWR impetus within BNDC may also reflect some rethinking within the GEC-English Electric-AEI group which owns 25 per cent of the consortium. The GEC group is known to be pursuing an internal policy of reducing the number of designs across its whole range of power engineering products in an effort to reduce costs and increase reliability. It is also significant that the GEC group is taking an active interest in a Westinghouse design for a pressurized water reactor and is involved with Westinghouse in a £60 million contract for such a reactor in South Korea.

Miscellaneous Intelligence

OPPONENTS of supersonic flight have been slow to point out that the bankruptcy of Rolls-Royce Limited has cast yet another cloud on the Concorde project. Theoretically, at least, the official receiver now in residence at Derby may eventually decide to close down the Bristol Division, the company at present manufacturing Olympus engines, in which case supersonic flight would presumably be delayed for several years. To be sure, a much more likely course of events is that Sud-Aviation would put in an attractive bid for the Bristol Division. Presumably with the interests of shareholders in mind, the receiver in bankruptcy would be compelled to sell, thus helping to ensure that what began as a collaborative aircraft finishes up almost entirely made in France.

THE visit of Mr Andrew Stein, State Representative in the New York State Assembly, seems to have replaced the Federal Aviation Board as the target of those xenophobes in Britain who believe that the United States seeks to hamper British innovation in aircraft by applying footling regulations. Resentment has still not entirely disappeared over the row fifteen years ago when the British aircraft called Britannia, named Whispering Giant by its advertising agents, was denied a certificate until its landing gear was modified. Mr Stein's apparently innocent bill to limit noise at New York airports to 108 perceived noise decibels

by July and by 98 p.n.d. by 1977 could be such a serious threat to the viability of Concorde that Mr Anthony Wedgwood Benn, once Minister of Technology but still MP for the Bristol constituency in which Concorde is manufactured, is off to New York next week to put the opposing case. But if Mr Stein should get his way, there may still be time to reconsider the best arrangement yet for using supersonic transports—a shuttle service between Newfoundland or Maine and Ireland, with subsonic feeder services from the terminals.

ONE SIGN that may be taken as proof that the polytechnics will in due course be just like other universities is that the students at the North London Polytechnic, an amalgamation of the Northwestern Polytechnic and the Northern Polytechnic in London, have been protesting against the appointment of Professor T. G. Miller as principal on the grounds that Professor Miller was for two years principal of the University College of Rhodesia. What the polytechnic needs now to establish its claim to be taken seriously as an establishment of higher education is, first of all, a visit from Mr Enoch Powell (whose car can be stopped by shouting crowds) and an opportunity to say no to a speaking engagement by the recent Prime Minister, Mr Harold Wilson, or the present Home Secretary, Mr Reginald Maudling.

Parliament in Britain**Swann Report**

MR JAMES PRIOR, Minister of Agriculture, said that the government intends soon to implement many of the recommendations contained in the Swann Report on the use of antibiotics in medicine. The retail sale of feeding stuffs containing certain antibiotics will be made unlawful except on prescription, to prevent antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria being passed from animals to humans. From March 1, 1971, penicillin, chlortetracycline and oxytetracycline will be restricted, and from September 1, 1971, tylosin, sulphonamide drugs and four nitrofurans will be brought under the regulations.

Mr Prior also announced that some drugs will be deregistered next year. (Written answers, February 11.)

Research Expenditure

THE research associations governed by the Department of Trade and Industry have been deriving a steadily growing proportion of their income from contract research during the past five years. Sir John Eden, Minister for Industry, said that the value of such work carried out by the associations in 1964 amounted to £799,516, but in 1969 it had reached £1,944,394. These totals represent 8.7 per cent and 13.5 per cent of the total gross income of all the Department of Trade and Industry in 1964 and 1969 respectively.

In reply to a later question, also from Mr John Osborn, Mrs Thatcher, Secretary of State for Education and Science, said that in 1968-69 payments for research services and other appropriations in aid contributed about £3 million—less than 10 per cent—to the expenditure by research council establishments and research expenditure by the Natural History Museum. Public corporations and private industry provided £4.1 million for research in universities. This amounts to about 4.6 per cent of the universities' expenditure on research and development in that year. (Written answers, February 8.)

CS

MISS BERNADETTE DEVLIN asked a series of questions about the toxicity of CS and use of the agent in Ulster. She asked whether the Ministry of Defence has ruled out the possibility that prolonged or repeated exposure to CS can lead to accumulation of cyanide in animal tissues, and whether there is any indication that CS can have a deleterious effect on sufferers from asthma. But Mr Ian Gilmour, Under-secretary of State, Ministry of Defence, replied that cyanide is not a cumulative poison and that there is no evidence to suggest that people suffering from asthma are unduly affected by CS. (Written answers, February 10.)