

mistakes made in the previous designs. This method of learning by trial and error is expensive and wasteful". The report also contains an assessment of the extent to which corrosion and protection are dealt with in educational courses of all kinds and comes to the conclusion that the training of engineers, designers and architects is generally deficient in anti-corrosion skills.

#### NUCLEAR ENERGY

### Oil or Nuclear Power?

THE decision by the Central Electricity Generating Board to defer construction of the 2500 MW Sizewell B nuclear power station until at least 1972 and to go ahead during 1971 with an oil-fired station on the Isle of Grain flies in the face of those who were predicting that the recent oil price rises would swing the balance of argument firmly in favour of nuclear power stations, in spite of their higher capital cost. The construction costs of these two power stations are now estimated to be about £250 million and £200 million respectively, even though the capacity of the Isle of Grain station is about 25 per cent greater than Sizewell B.

The CEGB has based its decision ostensibly on the smaller annual rate of growth of demand for electricity which the Electricity Council now predicts for the next five years (5 per cent rather than 6 per cent). The peak demand of 54,000 MW which was anticipated for the winter of 1975 to 1976 is not now expected to be reached until the following year, and the board therefore argues that it is not necessary to start work on Sizewell B for at least a year. But it seems that the CEGB does not feel by any means committed to the Sizewell project even in 1972, in spite of an investment of more than £1 million in the preparation of the site. The board may see the trimming of its nuclear power programme as a way of meeting the cuts required in capital spending which will soon be spelt out by the Treasury. The fact that the capital cost accounts for about two-thirds of the total cost over an average lifetime for a nuclear station must certainly weigh heavily with the board in the prevailing economic climate; the proportion is nearer one-third for an oil-fired station.

The Sizewell B design contract was awarded to the Nuclear Power Group (NPG) last November and the decision to mark time on the project has sent quite a chilly wind through the whole British nuclear power industry. There seems little immediate danger of the NPG running short of work, however, because it is involved in the construc-

tion of two other nuclear power stations, Hinkley Point B and Hunters-ton B; these are both 1250 MW stations powered by advanced gas-cooled reactors—the same type as planned for Sizewell B. The NPG has also been careful not to rely entirely on nuclear power contracts and has, for example, the design contract for a 2000 MW oil-fired station at Inverkip on the Clyde.

#### COUNTRYSIDE

### Power at the Top

THERE WAS evident satisfaction at the Countryside Commission when the chairman, Mr J. Cripps, announced on March 1 that the government had agreed to let the commission have a director at under-secretary level in the Civil Service. The change is more significant than it may seem. Mr Cripps was confident that an under-secretary will have more influence with ministers than the assistant secretary who has been the chief officer of the commission since its inception in 1968.

There can be no doubt that great things are expected of the new director, who is likely to be appointed in the next few weeks. The recent concession also includes a relaxation of Treasury control on expenditure. But the commission still has plenty of problems obstructing the full implementation of its job as the statutory national body responsible for matters relating to the conservation and enhancement of landscape beauty and amenity, and to the provision of facilities for the enjoyment of the countryside.

The greatest curb to the commission's activities is its lack of staff, and there seem to be no signs that the government will allow any increase in the near future. For this reason it is hoped that the officers of the commission will be consulted earlier in regional planning schemes so that some costly public enquiries can be avoided. Another grievance with the government is its decision to move the commission out of London. The commission does not want to go, saying that most of its business is transacted in London. The struggle will doubtless continue; meanwhile a nine months extension has been secured on the lease of the commission's headquarters at Cambridge Gate.

## Parliament in Britain

### Scientists' Unemployment

MR DUDLEY SMITH, Under-Secretary of State, Department of Employment, said that on December 2, 1970, there were 2,983 unemployed persons on the technical and scientific section of the professional and executive register. This figure includes 175 women. The information was given in reply to a question from Mr R. Carter. (Written answers, February 25.)

### Abortion Act

A COMMITTEE of enquiry has been set up to review the workings of the 1967 Abortion Act. The enquiry will be concerned with the way the act is working and not with the principles that underlie it, and the chief conditions for legal abortion will remain unaltered. Announcing this in a statement given to the House of Commons, Sir Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Social Services, also said that the government proposes to encourage the growth of local authority family planning services, especially in priority areas. Provision has therefore been made for expenditure on this service to treble by 1972-73.

Mrs Justice Lane will be chairman of the committee, and other members will be appointed later. The terms of reference of the committee are "To review the operation of the Abortion Act, 1967, and, on the basis that the conditions for legal abortion remain unaltered, to make recommendations." (Statement, February 23.)

### Desalination

THE government is not yet ready to make a decision on whether to support construction of a pilot plant, situated at Ipswich, for production of desalinated water. Lord Sandford, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment, said that the Secretary of State for the Environment should soon be able to come to a decision about the project. It would cost about £1.5 million. But Lord Kennett pointed out that when he was sitting in Lord Sandford's place nine months ago, before the election, he announced that the government was in the last stages of its consideration of the project. He therefore wondered why there has been such a delay in coming to a final decision. Lord Sandford replied that the government has been reviewing several schemes that were given the go-ahead by the previous administration, and he reaffirmed that a decision will not be long delayed. Lord Nugent of Guildford said that after a gestation period of nine months, there should be a reasonable prospect of providing an answer. (Oral answers, Lords, February 24.)