

ARCHITECTURE

Playing for Time

IN spite of all the alarms and diversions which have marked the progress of the school of the Architectural Association in recent years, the school seems determined to soldier on through yet another round in its battle for financial stability. Two months ago it seemed that all was lost when the Inner London Education Authority refused for the second time to recognize the school as a college of higher education and therefore to take financial responsibility for its existence. But now at the urging of the student body and with the full cooperation of the staff, a scheme of economies has been put forward designed to keep the school alive while a long term solution is sought.

These economies will be exercised chiefly in two directions: some of the school's full-time teaching staff will not be replaced when their contracts come to an end (and it is the school's policy to appoint staff for short periods only) but will be replaced by part-time teachers. It is also expected that quite considerable sums can be raised by sub-letting some of the school's accommodation. These measures, it is hoped, will cancel out and perhaps even reverse the overall deficit which in 1970-71 the President of the Students Union, Mr Patrick Hammill, said was about £50,000.

The future of the school has seemed shaky for many years now, but the quality and integrity of the teaching there have never been in doubt. Some 450 students, about 100 of them post-graduates, attend classes each year, representing about one-fifth of the total number of architects in training in Britain. Furthermore, the school achieves regularly the remarkable academic distinction of professional diploma pass rates of around 90 per cent. And, as Mr Hammill claimed, this is all done for about half the cost of a conventional university education. The school's fees are £460 a year which, on the basis of the size of the annual deficit, would seem to be about £150 too low. In at least one architectural department attached to a college of London University, the corresponding figure is about £1,200, made up partly from fees and partly from the Department of Education and Science.

Nevertheless the school, because of its peculiarly non-institutional status and robustly independent outlook, remains difficult to assimilate into conventional higher education. Protracted negotiations for a merger with Imperial College eventually fell through in 1970, chiefly it seems because Imperial College feared that the school's avowed intentions to stick to its democratic guns might prove a disturbing influence in the more re-

stricted organization of the University. Brief flirtations with other London colleges since then have proved no more successful.

So what for the future? Although for the time being the execution has been stayed, the future looks anything but bright. Two initial moves will be an approach to the DES for permission to raise fees—a move likely to be resented by local authorities who are already unhappy about the cost of educating an architect through the Architectural Association—and an attempt to relaunch the appeal first opened when a link with Imperial College seemed certain. There is about £200,000 promised or frozen in this fund and the school is busily contacting the donors for permission to use the money to fresh ends. The most important of these is, of course, accommodation. The lease on the Bedford Square premises ends in 1976, and there is as yet no indication that it will be renewed.

The outcome of this whole venture seems uncertain at present, but the school now has long practice in defying the financial and political pressures which seem to be leading irrevocably to its closure. Its supporters are sure it would thrive even if it were housed in a disused warehouse.

CERN ACCELERATOR

Scrutiny and Secrecy

SELDOM has a science policy decision taken by a British government been subject to as much public scrutiny as the decision to participate in the CERN 300 GeV project. In spite of this public exposure, however, did the Science Research Council and the government pay sufficient attention to the effects of the decision on other branches of science? According to Dr P. J. Smith (Open University), whatever the merits of the decision, it was simply the fruit of a "campaign of psychological warfare" conducted by nuclear physicists against the government, and insufficient regard was paid to priorities in science chiefly because there is no adequate framework for assessing such priorities. This thesis was received with some sympathy by many participants in the discussion about the 300 GeV accelerator, organized this week by the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science.

Few speakers at the meeting, Dr Smith included, declared themselves opposed to the CERN project, but many confessed that they are anxious about the procedure for taking such decisions. In particular, how can expenditure on such a project be set against expenditure on social services? To Professor E. H. S. Burhop (University College, London), the remark thrown out by Dr Smith that the government is

prepared to spend £3 million a year on the 300 GeV and yet to abandon the Consumer Council is incongruous.

The burden of Professor Burhop's argument was that the 300 GeV project is fully justified in the framework of nuclear physics—"there is no argument about the fact that high energy physics is worth pursuing and we cannot do it in a half-hearted manner"—and because there are still so many fundamental concepts in particle physics that are not clearly understood there will always be a case for spending more money on projects like CERN. But this esoteric argument was tempered with the suggestion that participation in projects such as CERN is a welcome development of international participation in science, a theme followed up by Dr R. Rosner (Rutherford), who defended the decision chiefly on the grounds that to abandon the 300 GeV accelerator would mean the end of European high energy physics.

Dr Rosner pointed out that the list of proposed experiments for the US 200 GeV accelerator at Batavia is already saturated, and the same is probably the case with the Soviet accelerator at Serpukhov; another large accelerator is therefore needed, and with the added advantage of superconducting magnet technology, the CERN 300 GeV project is worth supporting.

What the meeting should have been discussing, Dr Rosner suggested, was the scientific decision making process and not the merits and demerits of participation in one particular big science project. This suggestion was taken up with relish by other members of the BSSRS, although little in the way of fresh ideas emerged. The debate meandered slowly over the morality of defence research, took a look at the fact that some £2,000 million a year is spent on defence, and ended up on the doorstep of the Science Research Council.

Dr Smith, in his opening speech, suggested that the decision to participate in CERN owes its existence to the power of the nuclear physics lobby in both the Science Research Council and in the mass media. Such a situation essentially reduces science policy making to a situation of survival of the fittest, he said, and given such a situation, it is impossible to gauge the merits of a project in the light of other possibly equally worthy projects. And, even in the case of the 300 GeV decision, much of the debate in the Science Research Council was conducted behind closed doors, so that justice could not even be seen to be done. The impression left by the meeting was that although most of the participants were sufficiently convinced by the esoteric arguments for supporting the machine, many were worried about the obsessive secrecy that hallmarks much British science policy making.