

OLD WORLD

What the Public Thinks

THE British preparations for the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment are nearing completion. The past ten days has seen a flurry of activity, with the publication of the three outstanding reports of the working parties set up by the Secretary of State for the Environment a year ago to sound out public opinion on different aspects of the environment. (*Pollution: Nuisance or Nemesis*, chairman Sir Eric Ashby; *Human Habitat: How Do You Want to Live?* chairman the Countess of Dartmouth; *Fifty Million Volunteers*, chairman Mr Denis Stevenson all published by HMSO.)

Nuisance or Nemesis, the first of the reports to appear, contains no detailed recommendations. According to Sir Eric Ashby, the document is "not a report but a piece of reporting" which reflects public opinion, and so "is a summary of a spectrum of views". As such it contains some strong statements with little apparent justification. In particular its excursion into the world of nuclear power is destined to create mild concern among the planners of Britain's power programme who are planning that 60 per cent of all power should be obtained from nuclear sources by the year 2000. The report says that "it would be prudent to slow down the nuclear power programme until we have solved the waste disposal problem or until we have developed fusion power or some other type of reactor which does not leave dangerous wastes behind it".

The working party justifies its attitude by saying that man may put all his eggs in the nuclear basket before he discovers that a solution cannot be found to the radiation hazard. Then, Sir Eric and his colleagues continue, there would be political pressures to ignore these hazards.

The working party feels that a voluntary curtailment of the population is needed so that the population at some future date will not "be limited by shortage of food or resources". The working party was divided on whether a drastic revision of society's values is needed, with some members thinking "a fundamental and painful restructuring of our industrial society is necessary".

The report states that "pollution control involves many difficult and debatable decisions and governments... are unlikely always to judge correctly". The working party continues that the decisions and the underlying facts must be open to scrutiny by scientists, the press and the public to avoid costly mistakes.

The report ends in a flourish with the working party expressing the hope that "pollution [will] be brought under control and mankind's population and consumption of resources be steered towards a permanent position of sustainable equilibrium". The final words are a warning of impending doom if this advice is not heeded; "unless this is done, sooner or later—and some believe that there is little time left—the downfall of civilization will not be a matter of science fiction. It will be the experience of our children or our grandchildren".

In contrast to Sir Eric Ashby's report, Lady Dartmouth's working party makes more than fifty recommendations on which the members are in complete agreement. They are realistic enough, however, to say that they hope the government will "accept and implement some of our recommendations". Mr Eldon Griffiths, Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, said

that the government accepted some of the recommendations, wanted to think about some others and wanted to argue about the rest.

Lady Dartmouth said that what had surprised her in her travels about Britain were the differing attitudes of local authorities. The contrast is so great, according to Lady Dartmouth, that the good authorities are very good but the bad authorities are very bad indeed. In some places she said that she was "shocked to see what had been done to the habitat in the name of progress".

The working party recommends that people be encouraged to return to live in the middle of the towns. Lady Dartmouth does not favour "eroding the green belt" and she pointed out that there is plenty of land within cities for houses to be built. In the past, places "have been wrecked by lack of thought with planning permission injudiciously given".

EUROPE

Fears for the Universities

from a Correspondent

LORD BOWDEN, principal of the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, last week welcomed the attempts being made to define common standards for many European professions. But he also issued a note of warning about the way the negotiations have been and are proceeding.

A group of civil servants has been at work since 1962 in Brussels attempting to set standards and the group has produced forty draft directives which define how men should be educated if they want to be accepted within the community. (The group says, for example, that a man may not be a dentist unless he has taken a course which lasts for 5,600 hours spread over seven years and has allocated almost every hour to a particular topic.)

These directives, according to Lord Bowden, have been produced without regard for the national interests of members of the community and there are indications that the work is now being done with indecent haste in order to finish before Britain joins the community next January.

Lord Bowden also contrasted the relative tranquillity of the British university scene with the more troubled campuses elsewhere, particularly Ger-

many and the Americas. He said that even five years ago, senates were all-powerful and totally dominated by professors, but that they have now been swept away. All German universities, he went on, are governed by completely new councils, some of which include representatives of the local community, non-academic staff, technicians, cleaners and porters.

After tracing the reasons for overcrowding in European universities, where the student-staff ratio has, in some faculties, deteriorated from fifteen to one to fifty or even a hundred to one, Lord Bowden expressed some alarm at the prospect of Britain joining the European Economic Community. Students and professional men are able to move freely throughout the whole community, so Lord Bowden wondered whether British universities would be inundated by people who have taken school leaving examinations elsewhere in Europe and believe themselves to be entitled to university places in Britain.

Lord Bowden concluded by saying, in no uncertain terms, that Britain should reject the whole European university scheme out of hand. British universities, he said, cannot and should not be prepared to accept a system which totally inhibits academic experiments, which puts a straitjacket on both universities and professions and which is totally out of keeping with all Britain's most treasured academic traditions.