

OLD WORLD

Davies Under Fire

In spite of adverse comment during the past few months, the Select Committee on Science and Technology still considers that there should be a Minister for Research and Development in Britain. The committee now repeats its often stated view that Britain has no national policy on research and development—although it considers one imperative with entry to the European Community so near—and that a minister would provide “the strong, independent scientific voice in formulating policy decisions at a high level”.

The latest round in the controversy between the select committee and the government is included in a report published yesterday (*Research and Development Policy*, HMSO, £0.18) and is based on evidence taken from Mr John Davies, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, and Mr Michael Heseltine, Minister for Aerospace. Evidence was taken soon after the committee published its controversial first report where the appointment of a minister for research and development was suggested and at a time when Mr Heseltine had barely warmed his ministerial chair.

Mr John Davies was far from enthusiastic about the committee's proposals, and the committee now hits back. The committee states that comment on the proposals has “been largely negative” and it repeats its position that unless there is one minister responsible to parliament, who would make recommendations on “the range, structure and balance of the government's research and development as a whole, there can be no proper scrutiny of national objectives and how they should be defined”.

Whether the select committee's final plea will have any effect will soon be apparent, for the government after many delays is now saying that its white paper on research and development will be published within a few weeks. It is, however, doubtful whether the committee's latest broadside would have made any difference if it had been published sooner.

The committee also considers that there is an impending “lack of balance” in the budget of the Department of Trade and Industry, for projects such as Concorde, the RB211, the reactor programme and also the financing of government laboratories are all included in one budget with the first three items accounting for £137.8 million out of a total of £201.1 million in 1971–72. The committee states that such an arrange-

ment strengthens the case for an independent research establishment authority which it proposed in a previous report (see *Nature*, 238, 4; 1972).

The select committee pulls no punches in attacking Mr Davies for saying that a company's attitude towards its research and development is fundamentally different from that of a government. Mr Davies, says the committee, “has confused two things”. While the committee admits that the government has different criteria in making decisions on research and development, it insists that both government and industry have to decide on priorities. Such decisions, according to the committee, “inevitably involve the exercise of some central coordinating authority”. The committee then delivers the punch line—“in industry, this exists, but in government today it does not”.

POPULATION

Declining Fertility

COUPLES married for five years want fewer children than they did at the time of marriage. This trend, revealed last week by Dr John Peel, reader in sociology at the University of York, will no doubt send demographers rushing to alter population projections and will add further uncertainty to the predicted population of Britain in the coming years.

Dr Peel's survey covers 350 married couples in Hull who were first interviewed in 1965, soon after marriage. Then the mean intended family size was 2.61 children. By 1970, and an average of 1.51 children per family later, the intended family size had decreased to 2.23 children per family. This decrease is striking because previous comparative surveys of this kind have consistently shown that intended family size increases in the first five years of marriage, chiefly because of the inci-

dence of unplanned pregnancies. Dr Peel said last week that this reduction of intended family size at Hull, which has already been accompanied by a decrease of actual fertility compared with the expectations of the 350 couples when first interviewed in 1965, cannot be explained simply by the use of contraceptive pills.

In the interval of five years, 106 couples had revised their family intentions downwards and only 31 had increased their intended family size. The decrease which Dr Peel has described appears to be fairly uniform throughout the socio-economic classes but well-to-do people (classes 1 and 2) seem to have made a more drastic reduction of family size than other classes.

The results of the survey are published in the current issue of the *Journal of Biosocial Science* (4, 333; 1972). Fifty-five of the 106 couples who have lowered their sights say that their reasons are economic, while 20 of them were aiming for a smaller family for health reasons. Only six couples had lowered their sights because of the world's population explosion.

Of the 31 couples in the survey who had had to make an upward adjustment in their family sizes, 14 did so because of accidental pregnancies and only 7 said that they had done so in order to have a child of each sex. Two of the couples which had originally decided to remain childless had also in the intervening years decided to become parents.

In view of the decrease in the wanted family size, it is perhaps surprising that the survey showed the same percentage of unwanted pregnancies as had earlier surveys. Additionally, Dr Peel's survey shows that 70 per cent of first pregnancies were planned but for third and subsequent pregnancies, only about one half of the pregnancies are planned. According to Dr Peel, contraceptive failure is not an important contributor to unintended pregnancies.

Aharon Katchalsky Fund

THE Weizmann Institute has formed an Aharon Katchalsky Fund so as to commemorate Professor Aharon Katchalsky, who died in the massacre at Lod Airport on May 30. The intention is that an independent body of trustees should decide how best to spend the funds which become available. Professor Israel Dostrovsky, deputy director of the Weizmann Institute, said last week that it might be possible to commemorate Katchalsky's work not merely by means of fellowships tenable at the Weizmann Institute but also by the endowment of a chair in some branch of science.

Since the publication in *Nature* on June 9 of a letter by a group of distinguished molecular biologists and biophysicists, the Editor has received close on a hundred expressions of support for the concept of an Aharon Katchalsky Memorial Fellowship. The time has now come for translating this encouraging response into monetary terms.

Cheques should be sent to the Aharon Katchalsky Fund either at the Weizmann Institute Foundation, Rex House, 4 Regent Street, London W1, or at the Weizmann Institute, Rehovot, Israel.