

implemented last year after 14 years of negotiation will not be put into effect again this year.

All the commission has done is demonstrate that it is easy for those nations that no longer whale to wear their consciences on their sleeves. It is harder for them to persuade the nations who see whaling as economically attractive to feel the same way.

SPACE

Snags with UK-6

THE Science Research Council has agreed plans for a UK-6 scientific satellite and approval of the scheme now rests with the Department of Education and Science.

If approved, the satellite will carry three experiments, one from the University of Bristol to study heavy cosmic rays, one from the University of Leicester to investigate time variations in X-ray sources following up the work of OAO, and a joint experiment from the University of Birmingham and Mullard Space Science Laboratory to examine soft X-ray sources with the help of collecting mirrors (see *Nature*, 241, 403; 1973).

Approval for the satellite has been somewhat delayed by procedural problems in the Ministry of Defence Procurement Executive which manages the contracts for the SRC. The satellite is intended to be relatively cheap—total cost is put at about £3.9 million including the launch—and full advantage will be taken of experience gained from work on UK-4 and X-3. As a result, tendering for the contract was originally going to be on a single tender basis, but the Procurement Executive decided instead to have a competitive tender between the British Aircraft Corporation and Marconi Space and Defence Systems. Unfortunately one of the companies was unwilling to bid on a competitive basis and a certain amount of argument ensued. Tenders are expected, however, about September, by which time the DES should have made its decision.

SELECT COMMITTEE

Commission Won't Talk

THE Select Committee on Science and Technology has had to postpone next week's trip to Brussels to take evidence from the European Commission.

Mr Airey Neave, chairman of the select committee, said this week that the European commissioners have declared themselves unwilling to give formal evidence to the committees of national Parliaments. At present they maintain that they are only answerable to the European Parliament by way of the Council of Ministers.

Mr Neave said that it is likely that

other select committee chairmen will join him in demanding that the commissioners be liable to give evidence to national Parliaments on matters that affect national policies—for example, in the science and technology committee's case, on computers.

The problem is partly that the European Parliament has no machinery for taking formal evidence in the way of the House of Commons committees. Certain other national Parliaments have similar arrangements—the Bonn assembly for example—but it is not known if they have taken formal evidence in the way that British MPs are anxious to do.

The matter is likely to be taken up with British ministers, and may have to go to the European Council of Ministers for a decision.

The commission has, however, extended an olive branch in the shape of an invitation to visit Brussels informally while the matter is being sorted out. It appears that the commission is willing to talk to the committee off the record, but Mr Neave said this week that his

committee has yet to decide if it is prepared to go on that basis. The Overseas Aid select committee, however, has already accepted an invitation to make an informal "educational" visit.

Awkward though the matter is for the Science and Technology Select Committee, the attitude of the commissioners hits other select committees even harder. The Select Committee on European Secondary Legislation for example, is going to find it very difficult to do anything at all if the European Commissioners will not talk to it.

As a result it is possible that the chairmen of all the House of Commons Select Committees will act together in an attempt to resolve the problem.

If the visit had gone ahead as planned, the select committee would have taken evidence on computers, energy policy, nuclear power and research and development policy in the course of a two day visit to Brussels.

Some announcement on the committee's request to Mr James Prior that it be allowed to appoint a full-time science adviser is expected shortly.

Short Notes

Research and Development

MR JOHN DAVIES, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, is to be the minister responsible for co-ordination of research and development policy.

Previously Lord Jellicoe as Lord Privy Seal had held the responsibility, but with his resignation the situation has been reviewed and Mr Davies, rather than Lord Windlesham, the new Lord Privy Seal, is to have the responsibility. The reasoning behind Mr Heath's decision is that Mr Davies has responsibility for European affairs, and much research is now undertaken on a European basis.

Swine disease controls

MINISTERIAL orders to further control the operation of swill plants should be introduced by the end of August (see *Nature*, 242, 4; 1973). The recurrence of swine vesicular disease on May 31, after a lull of six weeks from April 13, has been followed by eight more cases of the disease, five of them since June 28. Only one of the cases in the secondary outbreak occurred on a swill fed farm, and although links have been traced between several of the other outbreaks, ministry officials are not yet sure why the disease emerged again. But close control of new outbreaks, the new controls on swill plants, and a warm summer which will limit the activity of the virus should ensure that the disease will be fully controlled by the winter. Since December 11, 1972, when the disease was first confirmed, 50,000 pigs have been slaughtered in over 90 outbreaks.

Cannabis and Research

THE legalization of the smoking of cannabis for research purposes has hardly caused a stir in Britain. The new regulation follows in the wake of similar legislation in the United States that legalized the use of cannabis for research purposes in October 1970, but the British action is as much a tightening up of the law as a relaxation. Previously cannabis could be given by mouth by any qualified doctor although under no circumstances could it be smoked. Now a licence is required before it is used in any way for research purposes. Nobody has any immediate plans to take advantage of the new regulations. Until the quantities of cannabis in the blood can be measured, there is relatively little point in experimenting with human patients.

Nuclear Power Company formed

THE National Nuclear Corporation is the name of Britain's new nuclear power company. The corporation is to replace the two existing consortia as the contractor for building Britain's nuclear power stations. GEC is the chief shareholder with a 50 per cent holding, with the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority holding 15 per cent of the shares on behalf of the government. The remaining 35 per cent will be held by industry.

The corporation is to have an operating company, called the Nuclear Power Company, which will also be chaired by Lord Aldington. Directors for the two companies will be appointed shortly.