

government departments outlined in the white paper did not take place in the year the report covers, but it shows a decline in the growth rate to only 3.2% in real terms against a growth of 6 to 8% *per annum* four to five years ago. Total expenditure amounted to £28.5 million, £26.8 million from the parliamentary grant, the remainder coming from government departments, private bodies and other sources.

## NUCLEAR POWER

### New Company Attacked

A DAMP squib of a report on nuclear reactors is all that the Select Committee on Science and Technology has managed to produce after a lengthy spell of study.

Evidence accumulated from the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, British Nuclear Design and Construction, the Nuclear Power Group, Sir Arnold Weinstock, Mr Tom Boardman, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Central Electricity Generating Board, and the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate has led the select committee to make six recommendations, some of which have been at least partially overtaken by events.

The committee recommends that

- unless the Nuclear Power Board is to be given an "effective role", it should not be appointed; in any case the new design and construction company should not be represented on the board;

- the government should take at least a 30% interest in the new company, and no single commercial interest should have a holding larger than 30%;

- the new nuclear company should hire its management expertise on a contract basis; (At present the government has given this role to GEC along with the 50% holding the company is to have);

- the CEBG should be required to order another nuclear power station very soon with government financial help if necessary;

- the development of the HTR should be expanded;

- the Chief Inspector of the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate should not hold any other post within the DTI.

This last point stems from the fact that Mr E. C. Williams, the chief inspector, told the select committee that he is also head of the Energy Technology Division of the DTI and as such gives technical advice to other sections of the department that deal with the fuel and power industries. The select committee states that the chief inspector should be clearly seen to be independent of policy considerations, and as such its recommendation seems sensible enough.

But the recommendation that the CEBG should order a new station shortly has already been met. It is clearly understood that a nuclear station is to be ordered next year when the government has decided which reactor type is to be built. Mr Arthur Palmer, chairman of the committee during the study, excused this by saying their report was based on evidence given by Mr Arthur Hawkins almost a year ago.

Equally the committee's recommendations about the structure of the new company arrive just after the structure has been decided, and the government is unlikely to chop and change at this stage. Does Mr Palmer think the committee's opinion will have any effect now? "Yes" said Mr Palmer, "there's a very good chance it will."

As for the recommendation that the Nuclear Power Board be given an "effective role", the committee fails to state what it considers such a role to be. Its only practical suggestion is that the board should have a full time chairman to "guarantee its key position in the scheme of things"

Having considered the thorny question of choosing the next reactor type, the committee concludes—in the wake of the departmental review carried out by Mr Peter Vinter of the DTI—that the choice is difficult. But the committee does appear to be withdrawing support for its long-time favourite, the steam generating heavy water reactor (SGHWR). The lack of enthusiasm for the system expressed by many of the witnesses—particularly with regard to the export potential—has finally damped the committee's fervour, and it recommends that the high temperature reactor (HTR) becomes a "major research and development effort" while "the government should undertake a serious appraisal of the work being done on the SGHWR; it might well be that there is little point in continuing it, sad as is such a conclusion after all the hopes of earlier years".

## SCIENTIFIC RESPONSIBILITY

### An Eye on the Future

SCIENTISTS are again to have their consciences stirred and their worries taken over by a public body. A Council for Science and Society, at the instigation of one Paul Sieghart, a lawyer, has appointed itself as a latter day, establishment-nurtured and charity-financed version of the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science.

At a meeting at the Royal Society last week, the council declared that it "will try to identify areas of research in science and technology which could have important social consequences for

good or ill, but which are not yet fully explored; to study these objectively, to attempt to foresee what their consequences might be; whether they should be controlled, and how; and to publish responsible reports designed to stimulate wide public debate about some of the issues of the future, based on the best information available. In this way it hopes to foster an active corporate social conscience in which the British scientific community can work".

And if you think you have heard those sentiments before, they differ little from the aims outlined in the BSSRS manifesto.

Not that the two organizations are the same. Paul Sieghart, who set up an interdisciplinary working party in 1971 to consider the problem of a corporate conscience for the scientific community (see *Nature*, 239, 15; 1972), sees BSSRS as a complementary pressure group to the work of the new council which is to be a "credible establishment body, producing sober and thoughtful reports".

The council's membership is long, distinguished and scarcely lacking in heavyweight names, with Professor Sir Michael Swann as chairman.

The subjects that Sieghart envisages occupying the council are those "just over the horizon" rather than those actually with us. In other words, not Concorde or pollution, but rather mood control drugs and genetic engineering. But the council does not have a programme of work. Sieghart is hoping that the subjects that the council will consider will be suggested by scientists actually working in the fields in question. "We will welcome suggestions from anyone," he says. "We want the largest possible shopping list."

Once subjects have been identified the council will investigate them, point out possible dangers and highlight possible solutions, handing the results over for Parliament, the press and the public to mull over. Finance for the first three years of the council's existence is being provided by the Leverhulme Trust in the form of £80,000.

Why a new organization, though, to inform the public of the scientists' fears? Paul Sieghart says that "the institutional machinery available to scientists for the most effective performance of their special social obligations is at present quite inadequate". The Royal Society, Mr Sieghart says, has not performed the role of social conscience "to the full extent necessary in modern times", and the British Association has, at present, neither the money nor the organization. But there are many who will wonder whether such an "establishment" organization might not have best been created within the existing frameworks.