

million on the research programme over the next two years, no accurate costing has yet been attempted. The companies plan to contribute to the construction and other costs as the commercial stage of the project draws nearer but they hope that the commission will foot the entire bill until it is decided which type of motor will be developed.

There is also some concern that the various governments can reach agreement on the sort of system they want

as readily as the commission seems to suppose. There is little point in the United Kingdom taking part, for example, unless the channel tunnel is in operation. Most population centres in Britain are so close together that, after the introduction of British Rail's new Advanced Passenger Train, journey times are unlikely to be significantly improved.

Unlike an existing rail system, where an individual company can take considerable initiative in its improvement,

a new high speed network requires an enormous capital investment (in civil engineering costs alone) which places it firmly on a national, if not international, level. It seems surprising, therefore, that the commission has waited until now to begin consulting the potential users of the scheme. Without an agreed specification from the governments and others concerned, the technical collaboration of the companies, such as it is, will remain in a vacuum.

correspondence

Oops

SIR,—May we look forward to your tectonics correspondent's report on Aberdeen's 20 km move SSW¹?

Yours faithfully,

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¹ *Nature*, 247, 416 (1974).

Population and politics

SIR,—The article "Is Population a Ministerial Responsibility?" is certainly a thought-provoking one, and makes the main point extremely clearly but it contains a statement which I think should not be allowed to stand unquestioned—that is "the current demographic position in Britain is that no serious economic or social problems which could be directly attributed to either its population size or growth rate are likely to emerge in the next 30 or 40 years". Further on Mr Cope points out that the Population Panel had argued the necessity of bringing home to the public the need to consider the aggregate consequences of their family building behaviour, in spite of the possible conflict of these consequences with individual preferences.

One point which immediately springs to mind is that, notwithstanding the very considerable publicity that has been given to the existence of family income supplements and similar benefits of this type, a large proportion of the group for whom they are meant are unaware of the existence of the benefits to which they are entitled, yet the limited evidence available in the report of the Population Panel suggests that this particular group, who form most of socio-economic group 5, are con-

sistently among those with the highest reproduction rate. Although there is clearly scope for a great deal of work in fields relating the family's economic status to family size as matters stand (and with the example of one difficulty in communication of a real need being all too apparent) it seems to me highly premature—if not completely wrong—to suggest that continuation of trends such as this could not give rise to serious social problems over the next 30 or 40 years. An equal problem may arise by the over-reaction to publicity of groups such as socio-economic group 1.

Yours faithfully,

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Cigarettes and guilt

SIR,—Although any contribution to the problem of deterring cigarette smoking by pregnant women is welcome, the airing given to it in your leading article of February 15 seems to me to need correction.

Your suggestion that a different approach would have been more effective and humane is not one which the careful preparatory work which we did bears out. A substantial survey of the reaction of pregnant women to the approach adopted, and a smaller one concerning the use of the naked figure, established quite clearly that the message and its form were entirely acceptable to those for whom it is intended. Conversely, much experience of the use, mainly by other organisations, of soft and pretty material has established that it is, as regards topics as serious and difficult as this one, largely ineffective. In-

identally, the effort we are making represents not only a new dimension in a continuing campaign against smoking in general; it is a specific effort to tackle the most clearly avoidable of all the factors affecting perinatal mortality.

The "well informed doctor and nurse" to whom you refer are a vital element in the campaign. Almost all the general medical practitioners and midwives in practice, and a great many clinic staffs, have received a personal letter setting out the scientific case for the campaign and inviting participation in exactly the way you have in mind, using our leaflet if they so wish.

Finally, of course we agree with your suggestion that information should be given to school girls about this topic and, indeed, several others affecting their health and well being. But this is a different exercise to which we are addressing ourselves as a separate activity.

Yours faithfully,

A. C. L. MACKIE

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Survival of science

SIR,—And, in an editorial¹, grovelling low Even at the base of Maddox's statua Which all the while ran blood, great *Nature* fell,
O, what a fall was there, my countrymen!

Then I, and you, and all of us fell down,
Whilst bloody doomsay flourish'd over us.

Yours faithfully,

THOMAS H. JUKES

Berkeley, California

¹ *Nature*, 246, 439 (1973).