

fied way, the editors were less enthusiastic. Between 40 and 49% of the public agreed that, when they are specifically looking for science articles in the press, they have difficulty finding them. About 68% of the science writers would like to see a weekly column on science in the press, and 44% preferred a full page weekly devoted to science. Yet among the editors, only 31% believed readers would like to see some sort of regular science feature; 70% felt that science should be presented only as items became available, and only five of 52 editors thought readers would want a full page weekly.

Perhaps some clue can be found in the educational backgrounds of the editors: less than one in three had any science courses at the post-secondary school level, and only 31% had a university degree (compared with 69% of the science writers). Although 20% of the editors reported they had had science or technical writing experience themselves, it ranged from one whose experience was "sporadic" to three with more than 20 years' experience.

The authors of the study draw the following conclusions:

"There is as yet a dilettante, hit-and-miss approach to science coverage in general, and Canadian science in particular. Even the barest informative functions of the press are not met in this area, let alone the interpretive or educative role (which is becoming more important as science affects the readers more and more).

"Often only the highlights of a scientific meeting or the outline of a project—with little relevance to impact on society are presented; in many cases by news services reporters and not by staff writers of the paper... Finally, even if good stories are written, they can still get postponed or not even used—frequently superceded by the most trivial, sensationalized items; or else buried in the paper where only the hardy will ever find them."

However, like good journalists, the authors did at least give something of the other side of the argument. One of the editors quoted, from a paper of approximately 50,000 circulation in the prairie provinces, commented: "The whole tenor of the questionnaire is so unrelated to newsroom practice that answers cannot have any validity. For example, anyone knows that any particular story has 100 facets, and to attempt to departmentalize 'science' in the modern world is meaningless. And while on any one day, no one may edit what you call a 'science' story, the next day 10 people may deal with 15 so-called 'science' stories. Go into the newsrooms and you'll find your answers. First of all, define 'science' news." □

BRITISH STEEL

Quiet change at BSC

ALTHOUGH the spearhead of the British Steel Corporation's attempts to stem its losses and revitalise itself depend to a great extent on agreement with the trade unions to a reduction in the total labour force (some 220,000 people at present), a step forward in rationalising its research and development was taken recently with the minimum of fanfare and publicity. Quite simply, the BSC now has a Chief Scientist and a Controller of R and D, in the true Rothschild tradition of the "customer-contractor principle".

The annual research budget of some £13 million may not seem much by comparison with the corporation's losses, which are now running at about £8 million a week, but when the BSC is properly on its feet again, it will undoubtedly profit from the more razor-edged research arrangements that now seem in prospect.

As from the beginning of last December, Dr Robert S. Barnes, until then Director, Research and Development, became Chief Scientist, and Mr James Mackenzie, who had been Technical Director of the General Steels Division, became Director, Research Laboratories. This means, essentially, that Dr Barnes says what he wants done and Mr Mackenzie establishes that it can be done and sees that the work is carried out.

At present the two men are sizing their new jobs up and it will be a few months before they finally sort out precisely how their responsibilities should be divided. It is fairly certain, for example, that Dr Barnes will have under him a team which will be responsible for investigations into the cost-benefit of research done by the BSC and for techno-economic analysis. Until December, research was carried on within the corporation's four divisions and at three "corporate laboratories" which used to make up the old British Iron and Steel Research Association, BISRA. This somewhat decentralised system has its roots back in the days before British Steel was nationalised, and it is no secret that there has been some overlap and duplication of work, which admittedly has been decreasing over the years.

The corporation has no plans to close any of the laboratories or to cut its spending on research, and any redundancies that may occur will be part and parcel of the BSC's overall labour strategy. The changes do mean, however, that laboratories will lose some of their autonomy under Mr Mackenzie, who will be based in Teesside in North-east England. And there

seems little chance of major new research avenues being funded with new money in view of the corporation's perilous financial situation.

These changes in research and development do little, of course, to help the corporation with its immediate problem of turning itself into a viable entity. Since nationalisation in 1967, BSC's capacity of some 27 million tonnes a year has been maintained while the number of individual steel plants has been reduced from 40 to 30, and the corporation's basic aim is to produce some 80% of a projected output of 35–37 million tonnes (in the mid-1980s) in just five major integrated steel complexes—two in Wales producing 9.5 million tonnes a year between them, two in North-east England with a combined output of 16 million tonnes and a Scottish complex (4 million tonnes). In these giant plants, ore will be turned into a finished product on a single site. The remaining 20% of the output will be mainly of special steels, and this activity will, as at present, be centred on Sheffield.

Up-to-the-minute though this may sound, BSC will be doing no more than the Japanese and others have already achieved: the Nippon Steel plant at Fukayama, for example, has an annual output of some 16 million tonnes, and that at Dunkirk in France produces about 8 million tonnes a year. It is widely agreed that a really viable steel plant must be sited near a deep-water terminal (thus eliminating the relatively very high cost of transporting ore by rail) and should have an output of several million tonnes a year (thus opening up the advantages of ore transportation in 250,000-ton bulk carriers).

Roger Woodham



Photo: Harrison & Laking

Robert Barnes, Chief Scientist at BSC.