BRITAIN

● Unsurprisingly, yet another view of the energy problem was heard at last week's 'Energy in the 80s' conference organised by the Institute of Chemical Engineers in Middlesbrough. It came from L. G. Brookes of the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) —speaking in his personal capacity, of course—and it was aimed at undermining the 'conventional' view.

The conventional view, said Brookes, argued that the OPEC oil price rises have been a good thing, by inducing thrift and providing an incentive to develop other alternative energies, so that reduced demand and promotion of coal, nuclear power and alternative energies will close the energy gap. According to Brookes, however, price rises are not the solution to the problem: "they are themselves the problem".

His argument is simple. High energy prices have affected the economy adversely. That has hit the rate of growth of electricity demand, upon which the rate of nuclear power installation depends. That in turn has severely reduced the rate of substitution of nuclear for fossil energy. "It follows", says Brookes, "that a reduction in energy prices (or at the very least their stabilisation) [is] our number one energy policy objective".

Brookes' leap of logic is based on his view that uranium, coal and Middle East oil are the only large sources of low cost fuel, that uranium, used in breeders, is a greater source than all others together, and that nuclear power is the cheapest, safest and cleanest way of producing electricity.

Those with problems accepting nuclear power will be quick to question the thinking behind such arguments. But there will be others who will find some of Brookes' additional conclusions controversial as well. For example: high oil prices have actually lowered "the level of economic high spirits necessary for major investment in new energy sources", and her current "flirtation" with wave and solar power, which arises "to some extent from a misdiagnosis of the problem", may do harm if it is seen as an alternative to nuclear power. There is no reason to take it for granted, he adds, that the days of cheap energy are gone forever.

The Department of Energy's view is different, naturally. Last week it announced that the £1 million feasibility study of wave power it unveiled last year is to receive a boost following the encouraging developments experienced so far. Now a total of £2.5 million will be spent by October 1978, with the extra money going mainly to larger-scale studies.

● Smokers in Britain who have felt under increasing pressure over the past couple of years will have noticed the recent period of fits and starts experienced by Britain's cigarette industry. Measures to reduce the

health hazard from smoking announced at the beginning of last month included a strengthening of the warning on packets, moves to extend public no-smoking areas and curb advertising, and the prospect of an end to high tar brands.

Close control of tobacco substitutes and additives according to guidelines from the Independent Scientific Committee on Smoking and Health (the Hunter Committee) was also sought, and at the end of the month the government gave the go-ahead to part-substitute cigarettes, the first of which may be on sale in July, subject to agreement on long term health studies. The Hunter Committee said it had decided to raise no objection to the carefully controlled use of two cellulose-based substitutes, Cytrel, made by Celanese Corp., and New Smoking Material (NSM), made jointly by ICI and Imperial Tobacco. The cigarettes will be mixed with about 25% tobacco, will carry the government health warning and will be no cheaper.

The price of cigarettes has since gone up, and the House of Commons Expenditure Committee on Preventive Medicine has recommended legislation against advertising and advocated dearer prices still, stronger health warnings and more non-smoking accommodation.

● The National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB), which last month published a review of its recent work over the three years 1974–76 (*The Work of the NRPB 1974–76*, HMSO, £2), published a paper last week on the radiation exposure of the British population (*Fallout in rainwater and airborne dust-levels in the UK for 1975*, NRPB–R49, HMSO, 50p). Based on the analysis for fission products and plutonium isotopes of rainwater and airborne dust collected during 1975, the results show average depositions of ^{137}Cs and ^{90}Sr in rain were less than 2% of peak values recorded in 1963 following a period of heavy weapons testing. Fallout during 1975 will contribute another 1% to the total dose people will receive.

● The departure of Francis Crick from Cambridge to the Salk Institute has directed widespread attention at academic salaries and the position of those who earn money abroad. So what are the circumstances of those at the top of the ladder?

Professors and their counterparts in MRC units are paid a minimum of £8,016 in 1976–77. There is no upper limit in universities, provided each university's average salary does not exceed £9,489. The MRC's Special Appointments Grade tops out at £10,200, though higher salaries are paid in respect of special service.

Five years ago the minimum was £5,376 and the professorial average £6,528; the cost of living index has since risen by at least 75%, while salaries have risen only 45% to 50%. Though everyone in this salary range has suffered substantial setbacks in real income, university and research council employees have suffered more than most. Many have been able to supplement their income by doing short periods of work abroad. Until 1974, this income was not taxed unless brought into the country, but in the past three years those who work abroad in a wholly separate job with duties entirely performed outside the country have been allowed only a 25% tax exemption of their earnings, regardless of where the money is kept.

The recent UK Budget has liberalised the tax position for many who work overseas under tax conditions less favourable than this, but has not made any further concessions to the category which includes visiting academics. The level of taxation on the 75% taxable will depend, of course, on the total sums earned in a year, but would typically run at a level from 45% if total taxable income in the year (including UK salary) was between £7,000 and £8,000, up to 83% for over £21,000.