

fuel fabrication plant at Dounreay, now the site of Britain's 250 MW prototype fast reactor and of a fuel reprocessing plant. This would eliminate the need to transport plutonium once the initial charge is delivered.

The UKAEA also hopes to demonstrate the concept of a single reprocessing plant servicing a "substantial number" of reactors. The idea of irradiating reprocessed and refrabricated fuel before it is dispatched back to a reactor is apparently under consideration, but there may, according to Sir John, "be easier, more convenient ways of achieving the same objective developed in the interim".

Convention signed

Representatives of over thirty countries, including the United States and the Soviet Union, gathered in Geneva last week to sign an international convention known as Enmod which prohibits the hostile use of environmental modification techniques. The convention, which took three years to negotiate, allows research and develop-

ment on the manipulation of the environment for peaceful purposes.

ACOPS report

A 20% increase (500 to 595) in the number of pollution incidents around UK coasts between 1975 and 1976 is reported in the annual report of the UK Advisory Committee on Oil Pollution of the Sea. The report, out last weekend, expresses disappointment at the lack of progress at the UN Law of the Sea Conference, another session of which opened this week in New York.

More teaching companies

To improve the interaction between industry and universities, the UK Science Research Council (SRC) and the Department of Industry (DoI) have agreed to expand the Teaching Company Scheme over the next five years. They will share the cost equally and have made provision for a maximum of £2 million to be spent in any one year.

First proposed in 1975, the scheme was designed to introduce able grad-

uates to industry under the joint super-industrial workers, in the hope that vision of university academics and they would remain and follow careers in management. Initially, the scheme was taken up by five companies in cooperation with nearby universities and although these programmes have suffered problems it has been decided to go ahead with new ones. Two more schemes were approved last week: Lesney Products in cooperation with North East London Polytechnic, and Anderson Strathclyde Ltd in cooperation with the University of Strathclyde. The target is now twenty teaching companies by 1982.

Asbestos meetings

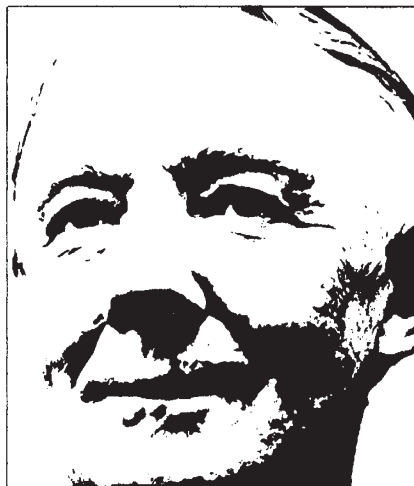
The UK Advisory Committee on Asbestos, set up in March last year by the Health and Safety Commission to review the risks to health from exposure to asbestos, has invited individuals and organisations who have submitted written evidence to attend three public meetings the committee is holding in London next month.

THE world's oil deposits are finite, and are likely to be exhausted within the next hundred years. Pessimists suggest that they may only last for twenty-five years, optimists believe there are supplies for two or three times as long. In the past oil has caused a great deal of environmental damage, including air pollution from refineries and spills from wrecked tankers such as the *Torrey Canyon*. The recent blowout at the Ekofisk rig in the North Sea is a reminder of continuing dangers which are unavoidable. It is important to ensure that this short-lived, though important, industry does not leave behind a permanently damaged world.

Although the oil industry exists to make a profit, the major companies have for some years taken a responsible attitude to the environment. A recent manifestation of this is the establishment of the Conoco Lecture by the Continental Oil Company, one of the major international entrepreneurs in this field. The first lecture was by Dr Peter Chapman, of the Energy Research Group of the Open University, on "The responsibility of industry towards the environment". He demonstrated how important it was to consider all stages in, for instance, energy generation, when trying to reduce pollution. A comparatively clean power station might depend on fuels and machinery which had already produced massive pollution. He stressed the point that

'market forces' themselves could not be relied on to protect the environment, and that industry must be prepared to accept restraints which may

Duty on oil



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reduce its profitability.

Pollution control is very complicated, and few generalisations can be widely applied. Legislation may or may not be effective. The first British Alkali Act of 1867 was strongly resisted by industry, but was effective in reducing the serious damage done by hydrochloric acid from alkali works. The Clean Air Act of 1965 is generally given the credit for clean-

ing the air of London and other cities; this myth was again propounded by Dr Chapman. Actually the amount of smoke and dirt in the air in Britain had been falling rapidly for ten years before 1956, and the rate of decrease was actually slower, not faster, after the Act was passed. It would be an abuse of the statistics to suggest that this law actually prevented air pollution from being controlled, but the main causes of the improvement were economic. By 1956 much of industry had already changed from burning raw coal to using oil, gas or electricity, all cleaner (and, at the time, cheaper) fuels. The change in domestic heating had been slower, but in more prosperous areas clean methods of central heating were widely used when the Act came into force.

Since 1956 it has been possible for local authorities to declare 'smokeless zones' where the domestic use of raw coal is forbidden. This has undoubtedly made the final clean-up of such areas possible, but smoke continues to pour out of the chimneys of many houses in our poorer areas, or in those where our miners receive—and burn—over ten tons each of concessionary coal a year. The law has been much less effective than have economic forces in cleaning Britain's air. It will be interesting to see the effects on the environment of the proposed expansion of our coal industry.