

increase the supply of plutonium and keep prices down.

Commercial rivalry is also said to have contributed to the rejection of the plan. The United Kingdom has already developed a process for fabricating mixed-oxide fuels and fears that a new research programme may compromise its capacity to collect royalties from the licensing of the process.

The desire to cut back on the commission's budget also probably contributed to the rejection of the programme, and thoughts are therefore now turning towards a "supplementary programme". Unlike a joint programme, this would be financed only by the interested countries.

Germany is committed to the plutonium-cycle programme because it wants to keep all options open, and public pressure at home makes any movement towards improving nuclear safety particularly attractive. Belgium, which generates 20 per cent of its electricity from nuclear power stations, feels that the programme would help towards securing steady fuel supplies. Italy and Holland seem prepared to go along with the programme but Ireland and Denmark are less sure — Ireland because it would draw little benefit in the foreseeable future and Denmark because it is interested only in the safety aspects of the plutonium cycle and would prefer the budget to be halved.

**Jasper Becker**

## Project planning

### Staged inquiries

The proposal that major planning issues of national importance, such as the fast-breeder reactor, should be decided in two stages, with a "project inquiry" followed by a local planning inquiry, was debated at a seminar on "The future of the big public inquiry" held at the Royal Institution, London on Monday 24 November.

The proposal has its origins in the work of a working party of the Council for Science and Society which issued a report in July 1979 recommending that project inquiries should investigate major proposals in depth, paying attention to the need for the project and considering all possible alternatives. One objective was to avoid lengthy and sterile wrangles at statutory local planning inquiries and even disruption by frustrated environmentalists.

There has recently been growing dissatisfaction with inquiries on national issues such as the building of major airports and motorways and nuclear installations. The siting of motorways seems to have been a particularly contentious subject and inquiries on such subjects have often been disrupted by highly regarded citizens.

The working party of the Council for Science and Society relied on the assistance

of Justice (the British section of the International Commission of Jurists) and the Outer Circle Policy Unit. The chairman was the barrister Paul Sieghart, vice-chairman of Justice, and the members were drawn from public administration, industry and planning.

At this week's meeting, Lord Kearton (with an extensive background of manufacturing industry) welcomed the proposal for preliminary project inquiries. He said few "big" inquiries were likely to arise in the near future and these would consist of proposals by the government for new motorways or for nuclear installations or refineries from bodies concerned with energy.

Sir Wilfred Burns, chief planner at the Department of the Environment, however, attacked the notion of the project inquiry. He argued that such a process would bring into question decisions reached democratically by parliament, the ultimate arbiter in matters of general policy.

The audience, consisting of officials, planners, consultants and members of pressure groups, seemed on the whole to have been in favour of the concept of a project inquiry. John Tyme, the veteran motorway protester, summed up the need for change by saying that many developers were "biased and ignorant, and many so-called experts on traffic or energy needs had been shown to be wrong".

**Kenneth Mellanby**

## French science museum takes shape

*Paris*

The new French Museum of Science and Industry is at last beginning to take shape, even if at present only in the form of an architect's model. Two years after the commissioning of a report on the possibility of a new museum, and a year after that report was handed in, the final architectural plan has been selected. This pace, extraordinarily slow even for France, is a result of the problems attendant on a prestige project of this kind in a country in which "prestige" often equals "personal politics".

As originally conceived by the President of France, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the museum was to be the scientific equivalent, in grandeur and prestige, of the immensely successful Centre for the Arts created by his predecessor Georges Pompidou. To be erected on the 52-hectare site of La Villette in the north of Paris, the project was to be the largest, most modern science museum in the world. The original report, prepared by Maurice Lévy of the University of Paris, envisaged the conversion of an existing building on the site to a 100,000 square metre showplace of scientific and technical advance (*Nature*, 3 January).

Since then, however, a number of problems have surfaced which threaten to delay the project or to change it a great deal. There have been problems of money; the floor space available to the museum has

had to be reduced by more than half, to 40,000 m<sup>2</sup>; even so, the whole project is expected to cost 800 million francs — at a time of growing austerity in France. There have been clashes of personality; early in the year Lévy resigned as head of project, to be replaced after a three month interregnum by André Lebeau of the Conservatory of Arts and Crafts, an older, very traditional Paris museum.

Nor has the departure of Lévy ended all the differences of emphasis on policy questions among the museum staff. For example, the director of exhibitions, Goery Delacote, speaks of using the history of science and technology to "show the failures as well as the successes" so as to avoid a "triumphalist" conception of

science, while general director Lebeau maintains that "the historical dimension should be present more to enlighten the comprehension of contemporary science than to tell the story of past science".

Added to all this is the fact that President Giscard d'Estaing retains a final say over all aspects of the museum's planning. Nor is this merely a formality. It was the president who chose the design of the winning architect Adrien Fainsilber from among the seven preselected by an international committee.

Thus the problems of a multiplicity of power centres, ambiguities in conception and increasingly tight financial resources suggest that the new museum is in for a prolonged and difficult gestation period which may last beyond 1984, the proposed date of completion.

**Jim Ritter**

*Will Giscard, like Pompidou, have a centre...*

