UK universities

Ex-premier attacks Thatcher

Mr Edward Heath, the former Conservative Prime Minister, fresh from his denunciation earlier this month of government economic policy, last week broadened his attack on his party's government to the field of higher education. Speaking at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, he condemned the present government's preoccupation with ridding the public purse of the cost of education from public funds. "That", he said, "is not what education is about."

Proudly declaring himself a heretic, Mr Heath said that it is a tragedy that the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, as a consequence of government policy, is being denied the funds to do its job properly. The school seems to have been especially hard hit this year. Overseas students at the school, 20 per cent up last year, have not this year materialized as hoped, leaving the school with a shortfall of £265,000. And the school is the only part of the University of London whose grant has been cut this year, by 3 per cent in cash terms or by more than 10 per cent allowing for inflation.

One of the school's immediate anxieties is the overhead cost of research projects, estimated as something like 30 per cent of the value of research. While the university's subvention as a percentage of

process of survival in the traditional community of an Indian village. Players participate as members of small family units who must manage their limited resources to produce and sell rice for their livelihood. International development institutions such as the World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization have apparently expressed interest in the game, which is marketed by Marginal Context Limited. Under the British government's small firms loan guarantee scheme, the company obtained a commercial loan from

the National Westminster Bank and has produced one thousand kits for sale at £195 a set.

As a former member of the Brandt Commission on North-South relations, Mr Heath spoke about the deteriorating situation of the developing countries. Referring to the Secretary of State for Employment, Mr Heath said: "Tebbit's doctrine of 'Get on your bike and get on with it' does not apply in Third World countries. It doesn't apply here either".

Jane Wynn

British telecommunications

Shares for all

The British telecommunications industry appears to have survived one of its most eventful weeks since the replacement of the cat's whisker by the triode in the 1920s. A committee under Lord Hunt, Secretary of the Cabinet in Mr Edward Heath's time, issued a liberal but tricky set of recommendations about the introduction of cable television to the United Kingdom. ITT agreed to dispose of a controlling interest in its British subsidiary, Standard Telephones and Cables Limited, whereupon the offer for sale of 40 million shares in the British company was promptly oversubscribed thirteen times. And the Department of Industry denied newspaper reports that the government intends to break its promise earlier this year not to sell off shares in the publicly owned telecommunications network British Telecom.

Politically, the Hunt report will preoccupy the British government in the next few weeks, at least until the new parliamentary session begins on 3 November. The issue to be decided is whether to set aside time for legislation, in the process giving the declared opponents of the Hunt report an opportunity to protest, or to embark on cabling Britain informally, with the consent only of British Telecom.

Whatever happens, the cabling of Britain cannot begin in earnest until next spring, after the report on 1 March from a committee set up by the Department of Industry to consider the standards that should be followed by the cable television system. The committee (under Dr E.N. Eden, previously in charge of British standards at the Department of Trade) will specify technical standards that must be met by interfaces between different cable systems, by interactive systems (in which users can answer back) and by direct broadcasting satellite systems (with which, in due course, cable television will have to compete).

The Hunt committee's report (Cmd 8679, HMSO), accepts without comment the British government's view that the rapid development of cable television would help to rescue the British economy from the doldrums. By recommending that holders of cable television franchises

Science books: Frankfurt gloom

Heidelberg

At the world's largest annual international book fair held in Frankfurt (FRG) (6-11 October) 5,688 publishers presented some 300,000 books and journals, including 86,000 new publications but there was a 22 per cent reduction in new scientific titles.

As 90 per cent of scientific literature is bought by libraries, this must reflect a worldwide downturn in library spending. In West Germany the outlook is grim. In June this year the West German UNESCO Commission called attention to the plight of the country's libraries. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, West German universities were a fairly firm market for academic literature. But, in 1981 and 1982, cuts in library budgets (1982 average 19 per cent), together with steeply rising prices and the fall in the value of the Deutschmark, have combined to reduce buying power of university libraries by 35-40 per cent.

In 1982, 80 per cent of all libraries had reduced budgets. In North Rhine Westphalia, for example, the budget cut was 62.5 per cent. Some libraries are buying no books this year and a national survey showed that, in 1981-82, 26,000 journal subscriptions were cancelled, at least 10,000 without substitution. Information gaps are arising that will be difficult and expensive to fill later.

Meanwhile the libraries are making strenuous coordinated efforts to economize. There is a trend to specialist collections, partly supported by grants from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, to more interlibrary lending, and greater use of photocopying. The result for publishers is a downward spiral of increasing prices and decreasing sales. Expensive monographs and journals published on marginal budgets are particularly vulnerable. Specialist journals, on the other hand, with a clearly defined readership are safer.

Sarah Toozee

income has been falling, from 44 per cent three years ago to 30 per cent now, research income has been rising. Meanwhile, research grant income has increased from 40 per cent to 45 per cent of the total. The dean of the school, Dr C.E. Gordon Smith, said last week that he will now have to consider not taking on extra research grants. Because research income covers about 75 per cent of staff costs, this would have serious implications. A deficit for the year of around £300,000 is on the cards.

Mr Heath had turned up to launch a green revolution — the name of a game devised by academics at the school and the University of Cambridge as a teaching device for students and managers of agricultural development projects. The "Green Revolution Game" simulates the