

the other way? These questions, fortunately, are too simple. The countries of Western Europe are still cultivated places, and give those who work in them pleasure and stimulation. Indeed, it would be fascinating but also alarming to see what would happen to the brain drain if Europe were not the exciting place it is. But the last ten years have also seen the awakening in Europe of some of the self-catalysing industrial vigour which has made the United States such a dominating influence in the past 40 years. Even if GNP were all that mattered, growth is now faster in Europe than in North America. A few decades could see quite a substantial change in the industrial balance across the Atlantic. It is no wonder that a great many talented technical people still stay at home.

In any case, although there can be no simple remedy for the loss of people short of an economic miracle, there are many partial remedies ready to hand. Several speakers in the House of Lords emphasized yet again how much benefit there would be if scientists and technologists could be given the promise of more creative and rewarding careers. The need that industry in Britain should come more fully to appreciate the capital value of the technical people it employs is now self-evident, but eventually it will be for society as a whole to decide where to strike a balance between the cost—not only in salaries—of keeping scientists usefully employed at home and the cost of letting them take their skills elsewhere. As things are, the balance lies too much in favour of emigration. In British universities, there is much to be said for fostering the development of centres of excellence along the lines and for the reasons suggested by Lord Annan in the House of Lords, and the government will no doubt think it a happy coincidence that this same objective is also being canvassed by people such as Professor Michael Swann (*Nature*, **212**, 1285; 1966) as a means of making better use of public money spent on research and development. Then it is plain that much good will be done by building on the European ideals of the common marketeers and now, at last, of Mr. Harold Wilson; the object should be to make Europe still more intellectually alive than it is at present. In these and many other ways, the partial remedies for the brain drain are also desirable policies in themselves and fortunately, not merely in Britain but elsewhere in Europe, there have recently been good reasons why governments should take them seriously. It follows that the loss of technical people should not be regarded as a problem in its own right but rather as a spur to make sensible policies for the administration of science and technology throughout Europe.

None of this affects Lord Bowden's argument that an international free market in science and technology confers on smaller countries the right to have some say in the kind of science undertaken elsewhere. It will be valuable if the committee under Dr. F. E. Jones (*Nature*, **212**, 965; 1966) can make some quantitative estimate of the degree to which the massive spending on space research and other activities in the United

States has served, in the last decade, to accelerate the westward drift of people. But even if it should turn out that there has been a serious loss on this account, it is hard to see what can be done about it. Certainly it would be impractical to think that major decisions on policy in the United States would be taken only after formal consultations with governments thinking themselves threatened by the loss of people. The best that could be done would necessarily be informal, but it is not unreasonable to hope that scientists outside the United States will not in future be shy of saying what they think of proposals which, by their size, have international implications. In the long run, plain speaking is likely to be more valuable than formal and necessarily clumsy administrative devices. The plan, announced on November 28 in the United States, for doing something to "close" what is described as the "technological gap" is unlikely to be a real substitute for policies determined within Europe to increase its own prosperity and, at the same time, its capacity to hold people.

LAYMEN'S DILEMMA

THE Sheffield Regional Hospital Board may have started a bitter debate by its decision to set up a panel to select patients for renal dialysis. The treatment enables patients with some kinds of kidney disease to be kept alive by intermittent treatment on a kidney machine. There are too few machines, and too few trained people to operate them, so the consultant in charge has to decide which patient has the greater right to be treated. It is a decision which any consultant would wish to be spared, and the consultant in charge of the unit to be set up at Lodge Moor Hospital, Sheffield, suggested that a small panel be set up to determine priorities for treatment.

There is, first, the problem of establishing criteria. These are likely to centre on the concept of social usefulness, but to say this poses more questions than it answers. Will young people always be preferred to old? Are conventional people more valuable to the community than those with extreme political beliefs? To what extent does money or education increase a person's social usefulness? The idea also seems to intrude on one of the most jealously guarded principles of the medical profession. For the first time doctors will be told who to treat and who to leave alone. It is hardly surprising that no other hospital board operates a scheme of this sort or—according to the Ministry of Health—has any intention of doing so. But the difficulty of making the decisions should not obscure the fact that if there were more machines and people to operate them, decision making would be easier. There is a strong case for spending more money on dialysis machines, and on the development of a machine which is easier to use. Perhaps this is a field in which the Ministry of Technology could do much to help the hard-pressed health services.