NEWS AND VIEWS

Aluminium at Home

SEVERAL aluminium companies have made independent proposals to the British Government about the construction of an aluminium smelting plant in Britain. Last year, 259,000 tons of unwrought and 80,000 tons of wrought aluminium were imported at a cost of more than £65 million, while the home production of aluminium ingots was only 35,000 tons. The government is doubtless aware of the savings to be made by setting up smelting works; the problem is one of cheap and adequate power supplies for these hungry users of electricity. The small Scottish plants, running on hydro-electricity and which produce most of the British aluminium, were built well before the last war. The sudden renewal of interest in the possibilities of smelting in Britain derives partly from the fear of import duty on ingots if Britain is to enter the European Economic Community and partly from the prospects of cheaper fuel.

Most of the companies are more interested in the cheapness of the electricity for their projected plants than in its source. Rio Tinto Zinc Corporation, however, has submitted a plan whereby its aluminium plant would share the entire output of a nuclear power station with the Atomic Energy Authority's gaseous diffusion plant at Capenhurst. This is at present supplied with enormous quantities of electricity by the national grid. There may indeed be logic in making large and constant users of electricity independent of the public supply, though less than 10 per cent of the electricity produced in Britain last year was generated outside the public electricity boards. The cost of the plan, both to the aluminium company and, through the effect on the national grid, to the ordinary consumer, is at present being studied by the government. There have been suggestions that the government may be able to participate in these ventures by means of a bill, soon to be introduced in the House of Commons, that would enable it to take up shares in private industry. In any case, there is always the Industrial Reconstruction Corporation. The implications of the proposals are many, and a statement from the government, when it comes, may affect a good deal more than just the aluminium industry.

Engineering at Cambridge

AT the recommendation of the Faculty Board of Engineering, the Mechanical Sciences Tripos at Cambridge is to be replaced by an Engineering Tripos. Courses for this new tripos will begin in 1968 and the first examination for Part One will be in 1970 and for Part Two in 1971. The importance of this change lies in the fact that Part One of the new tripos will take only two years and will not be considered sufficient for a degree. All engineering students will be required to take Part Two. This change brings the engineering faculty into line with the others at Cambridge which have one by one decided to insist on a Part Two. The existing Mechanical Sciences Tripos is now the only one that still considers Part One to be a three year degree course. At present, exceptional students have been completing Part One in only two years and then going on to take Part Two, which in many ways is the equivalent of a postgraduate course.

One of the important effects of the change is that the new Part One courses will be less specialized—it must, or should, be impossible to teach in two years what previously took three. This in turn should make it easier for students to move between faculties, from natural sciences or mathematics to engineering for example, and, after all, this sort of flexibility is supposed to be a great virtue of the Cambridge Tripos system.

The new Part Two will offer a much greater variety of courses. The new tripos includes several more general courses including economics, statistics, operation research, sociology and psychology. The faculty hopes to cater not only for the outstanding engineer who wants nothing else, but also for the numerous students who would benefit from a more general outlook on how engineering fits into society and the economy. At present large numbers of engineering graduates go directly into management rather than spending some time in design, and for them the general courses now being offered are virtually vocational training.

Another change is that the results of the examination for Part Two of the new engineering tripos, like those of all other faculties, will be classified. At present Part Two of the Mechanical Sciences Tripos is a pass or fail affair. This decision to give classes is not universally welcome. There is a strong case for arguing, especially in such a broad field as engineering, that it leads to the very antithesis of education, with too much emphasis on subjects likely to turn up in examination papers rather than those that really interest the students, and, of course, supervisions becoming coaching periods. All in all, however, the new engineering tripos should prove to be a distinct improvement on the one it replaces.

Drugs in Britain

WHEN the Dangerous Drugs Bill becomes law, two important changes will be made in the treatment of drug addicts in Britain. All addicts will have to be registered and drugs such as morphine and heroin will not be available except through special centres. The Ministry of Health has announced that there are shortly to be ten such centres for in-patients in London and thirteen centres, less closely associated with hospitals, for out-patients. Both types will cater only for heroin and morphine addicts, whose number is estimated at between 1,250 and 2,000, mostly in London. The measure was prompted by the conclusion of the Brain Committee that a few doctors were prescribing too many drugs to registered addicts, and thus supplying a black market.

The World Health Organization has now published a report on Services for the Prevention and Treatment