

How BLMH Compares (1966 Production)

	Cars	Commercial Vehicles
GENERAL MOTORS	5,557,000	934,000
FORD	3,380,000	765,000
CHRYSLER	2,118,000	211,000
VOLKSWAGEN	1,219,000	84,000
FIAT	1,148,000	66,000
BMC+LEYLAND	788,000	173,000

and safety have also added to the amount of research necessary, but so far the idea of a central research laboratory for the group is no more than talk. The situation in BMH is very similar, although its body-making subsidiary, Pressed Steel Fisher, did open a central laboratory some months ago. Like most engineering companies, the motor companies have been slow to catch on to the benefits of large scale research. This is not to say that no research work is done, but rather that it is done in a diffuse way, and probably on too small a scale for such an important industry. In the short term there is little chance that this can be avoided—the immediate need for the new company is for some substantial profits.

No Naked Socialists

THE Industrial Expansion Bill, heralded by cries of horror from the Confederation of British Industry, was made public last week (HMSO, 2s.). And despite the advance publicity—Mr John Davies, Chairman of the CBI, called the bill “mischievous and absolutely childish”—it seems unlikely to allow the Government a very strong hand in private industry. The bill provides in the first place for £100 million to be made available to help private industry in schemes which would benefit the national economy but would not be undertaken without support—the sort of support the Government has already made available to the computer companies, the aircraft companies, and more recently the aluminium smelters. The total amount available could be increased to £150 million if Parliament approved. The effect of the measure will be to allow support of this sort to be given without lengthy legislation; but in each case an industrial investment scheme will be drawn up, approved by the Treasury and finally approved by the House of Commons. The measure is hardly naked socialism, nor is it a licence for what is sometimes called “back-door nationalization”.

There will, for one thing, be no power of compulsion vested in the bill, for only plans agreed between the Government and the company involved will be supported. The various ministries involved in the investment schemes will be advised by a committee to be set up by the Minister of Technology, and the bill also empowers the National Research Development Corporation and the Industrial Reorganization Corporation to assist the committee and provide advice of their own. The ministers involved will have to report annually to Parliament on the workings of the scheme.

There is no doubt that the bill enables the Government a measure of discrimination—some companies will undoubtedly be supported while others will have to do without. But this is hardly more than the Government already does through its purchasing

function. In the absence of a large space or defence programme, it is argued, purchasing power alone is not enough to support the industries which need support. Hence the bill, which seeks to do in a more direct way what is achieved by space and defence programmes in the United States. Whether the attempt will be successful is uncertain—the intervention of government in private industry has not always been well judged—but even the CBI would hardly claim, for example, that Britain would now have a viable computer industry without Government support at crucial moments in the past.

The bill also provides for a number of measures which had already been announced. Among them is the loan to Cunard of £24 million to complete the Queen Elizabeth II, and the increase of the borrowing power of the NRDC to £50 million. The Shipbuilding Industry Board is to be provided with an additional £15 million, and £1 million is set aside for the purchase of the Beagle Aircraft Company.

Last Word on Torrey Canyon

TEN months after the incident, yet another report on the Torrey Canyon disaster has been prepared—this time by the committee of scientists convened by the Chief Scientific Adviser to the British Government, Sir Solly Zuckerman. Readers will be forgiven for asking whether they have heard it all before. Admittedly the information is clearly presented and very detailed, but there will be many who wonder why it has taken the committee so long to report.

The object is to collect the lessons learnt during the aftermath of the Torrey Canyon incident and to examine the measures to be taken in future, but this also has a familiar ring about it (see *Nature*, 216, 533; 1967). As outlined in the report, the incident was tackled in six parts: how to deal with the oil remaining in the ship, how to dispose of oil on the sea, how to prevent oil reaching the coastline, how to treat beaches which might be contaminated, how to reduce dangers to marine life and how to co-ordinate the efforts of other bodies dealing with the threat to wild life.

The sequence of events and counter-measures is familiar enough, but it is interesting to note that methods for reducing pollution which were considered impractical in Great Britain were in fact used in France. For example, the French successfully sank oil with powdered chalk in the deep waters of the Bay of Biscay, where there seems to have been no damage to fisheries. Despite the heavy and continuous contamination of the coast of Brittany, detergent was not used and consequently there was far less damage to the flora and fauna.

What are the lessons learnt from the disaster? At the top of the committee's list is the fact that most of the decisions taken during the crisis had a scientific or technical basis. It suggests therefore that if there is ever another disaster on a similar scale, a team of scientists should again be appointed to co-ordinate scientific advice. Another recommendation is that every effort should be made to salvage a grounded vessel, and that the cargo should be removed by pumping wherever possible. Failing that, and if environmental conditions permit, the ship should be set on fire after opening the tanks, if necessary by bombing. The committee hopes that much of the research work which