

example, it has spread itself too thinly. Sometimes plans which have been broached to the people most directly affected have then been put into cold storage for lack of people or money to follow them through. On other occasions the ministry has been downright inconsistent or ambiguous. What, for example, is its policy towards the research associations? What precisely does it mean by the European Technological Community? Then, with the most human frailty, it tends to grasp the thorny nettles last of all—there is, for example, little sign of movement on the reorganization of the nuclear power industry. Elsewhere the ministry's influence, no doubt unwittingly, has been mischievous. Its joyful espousal of the cause of triology has been indecently innocent. By going out of its way to make technology respectable (which it is), the ministry has cast what it calls pure science in a villain's role and it will be a serious matter if that becomes a permanence.

At this stage nobody can know precisely what the future holds. The Ministry of Technology may have been able to prove the point that governments can usefully play a creative part in industry, but it does not follow that the patterns of administration now being created will last indefinitely. And in many ways, of course, success implies that the ministry will do itself out of a job. Now, for example, that its efforts to weld the British companies in the British motor industry into a single unit have been successful, it is much easier for the ministry to wash its hands of the motor industry's anxieties. By the same test, if and when it rationalizes the computer industry, it will be able to retire gracefully to those sidelines as well. To say this, of course, does not mean that there will be nothing for the ministry to do, but rather that its industrial interests are bound to change frequently with the passing of time. In the circumstances, it is hard to see just what part the ministry's laboratories will play in the continuing future—is there really a need for them? But if it were not for the laboratories, what distinction would there be between the Ministry of Technology and several other agencies of government—the Board of Trade, the Ministry of Power and the Department of Economic Affairs, for example? In other words, although the Ministry of Technology has made a useful start, and although the foreseeable future is crammed with work, it will not be surprising if ten years from now the pattern of administration is radically different from what it is at present. And the test by which it will eventually be judged is whether, like the midwife it should aim to be, it will be prepared to retire gracefully once it has done its obvious job in some sector of British industry. The signs are not always encouraging.

### Expensive Nuclear Power

THE controversy over the way in which British nuclear power plants are built is not being allowed to die a quiet death. Mr Norman Atkinson, Labour Member of Parliament for Tottenham, has tabled a motion in the House of Commons urging the Government to

implement the findings of the Select Committee on Science and Technology, of which he was a member. The committee, which produced its report in December 1967, said that nuclear power stations in Britain should be designed by one large group, taking in all the experience of the existing three consortia and of the Atomic Energy Authority. Mr Atkinson has since resigned from the committee, because, he says, he did not agree that an all party body was the right way for a Labour Government to determine its policy on nuclear power. Despite this, his motion that the recommendations of the select committee be now implemented has been tabled, and has the support of over one hundred Labour Members of Parliament.

Mr Atkinson is convinced that the way in which the Central Electricity Generating Board has organized the building of power stations has cost Britain £40 million. This suspicion arose originally in the proceedings of the select committee, when it emerged that the CEGB had approved a change in the design of the channel diameter between Dungeness B and Hinkley Point B, the first two advanced gas cooled reactors to be built. It was claimed that, if this change had not been made, some £11–13 million could have been saved on Hinkley B. Both the CEGB and the Nuclear Power Group, makers of Hinkley B, indignantly dismiss the charge, and it is probably fair to say that other members of the select committee were doubtful about it too. Very little was made of it in the report. Mr Atkinson has now extended the same argument, claiming that, if all the first four AGRs had been identical, £40 million could have been saved on the capital cost of £320 million. "The CEGB commissioned virtual replicas, but did not get the economic saving of replication," Mr Atkinson says. The civil engineering work on all the power stations was also far too expensive—companies from the United States could have done it for half as much.

All this is likely to be taken as just another example of Mr Atkinson's enthusiastic approach to politics. There may well have been mistakes in the arrangements of the first few AGRs, but it is very unlikely that they will cost as much as Mr Atkinson claims. The difference between United States capital costs and British ones is at least as much a function of the design of the reactor system as it is of civil engineering inefficiency. But it is entirely sensible of Mr Atkinson to feel that it is about time the Government made up its mind about the future pattern of nuclear power in Britain. Until the select committee report was published, there was almost an excuse for inaction, but by now the Government can quite properly be accused of indecision. Mr Atkinson claims that the Government is under pressure from the consortia to retain the existing system—which is doubtless true—and that the CEGB also opposes the single design authority. Even if the Government were not on the point of announcing new nuclear power stations to provide power for aluminium smelters, there would still be no excuse for further delay.

### Sites for Nuclear Power

THE British Government clearly intends to build nuclear power stations much nearer to centres of population. In the House of Commons last week, Mr Richard Marsh, Minister of Power, said that some modification of the policy of building nuclear stations