

It is certain that other industries which use electricity intensively will ask for the same treatment; the British Steel Corporation is an obvious candidate. Not the least of the difficulties is finding out what the terms of the contracts are: as Mr Anthony Crosland, President of the Board of Trade, said in the House of Commons, "I cannot tell him (the Hon. Member) the price. It is never revealed in contracts of this kind. I can assure him, however, that it is completely unsubsidized". The Government is already covering itself against claims from other users by saying that the demand must be "substantially new" or evidence must be produced that existing operations are becoming uneconomic. But this is no more than inventing principles to suit policies. Even the parlous state of the British balance of payments (which is at last showing signs of recovery) can hardly be held to justify such an arbitrary way of doing things.

Data Processing Delayed

THE Post Office plan to promote the use of computers by creating a National Data Processing Service (NDPS) seems to be barely off the ground, although the Bill giving the Post Office power to provide the data processing service became law last year. It is true that at the beginning of the current financial year the National Data Processing Service became a self-accounting unit within the Post Office, but so far it has only one outside customer—the Customs and Excise Department, which is planning to start using the service in the early 1970s to help with the documentation involved in the importation of goods through London Airport.

The philosophy behind the NDPS is that, by 1971, the Post Office will have as many as twenty large computers. Several of the machines are for special applications, the control of the aeriels at Goonhilly, for example, or will be part of the Giro banking system, but a number of the computers earmarked for commercial purposes within the Post Office are also suitable for use in the data processing system. The form the service will take has still not been publicized, but it seems there will be some flexibility to meet the needs of customers. Both on-line and off-line data processing will be provided.

Just now, the Post Office seems to be keeping quiet about the service, no doubt because at present its computers are heavily committed to Post Office work. Like all computer users, it is finding a shortage of experienced personnel; nevertheless it is reaching its target of 100 recruits a year to train as computer operators. Some of the delay in setting up the NDPS may also have its roots in the problem of starting the Giro system, itself ambitious enough.

Contraception in South America

In his recent encyclical, the Pope has forbidden all forms of birth control with the exception of the so-called natural rhythm method. The prohibition covers all means of contraception, as well as abortion and sterilization. The burden of the Pope's sentiments is likely to be borne most heavily in Latin America, a predominantly Roman Catholic continent. How will the encyclical be received in Latin American countries?

Official policies towards birth control in Latin

America are a reaction to the peoples' manifest desire to limit their fertility. Given the attitude of the Church and state, this desire has to be expressed in the form of abortions, which have now reached epidemic proportions in some Latin American countries. In Chile, according to a statement by the Minister of Public Health, there is one illegal abortion for every two live births. In 1965, 20 per cent of the beds in Chilean maternity hospitals were filled with patients suffering from the effects of illegal abortions, and 39 per cent of maternal deaths were due to the same cause. The abortion rate for Latin America as a whole is estimated to amount to between 25 and 30 per cent of all live births. The Chilean Government has perhaps been the most sensitive to suffering inflicted by official policies, and last year the Minister of Health announced a family planning campaign—a courageous step for a Christian-democrat administration. The minister referred to the abortion statistics to justify this change of policy and said that family planning advice would be made available to married couples, particularly those in the lower-income groups, with the hope of reducing the number of abortions.

The Chilean lead has been followed by a number of other Latin American governments; family planning units, either allowed or sponsored by the governments concerned, are operating or about to operate in the Argentine, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Dominica and Ecuador. The effects of the Pope's encyclical are most to be feared at the governmental level. For the individual, it is plain that the Church's doctrines on birth control are widely ignored. Abortion is a graver Roman Catholic sin than contraception. Governments, however, may feel stronger pressure from the Roman Catholic hierarchy to abandon the family planning campaigns they have begun.

Another spectre raised by the Pope's encyclical is that the World Health Organization may be denied its eminently proper and necessary interest in birth control. Proposals that the WHO should advocate birth control have several times been frustrated by its delegates from Catholic countries and only recently have they withdrawn their opposition. It is conceivable that these delegates may be re-instructed.

Biggest Broker Yet

As part of the deal by which Rolls-Royce obtained the contract to supply engines for the Lockheed 1011 airbus, Air Holdings, a British holding company, became one of the world's largest brokers of aircraft. Rolls-Royce, to overcome Congressional fears about the adverse effects on the American balance of payments of buying British engines for American aircraft, had to lay on a substantial export order for the 1011. Through the offices of Lord Poole and his friends in the city and in Air Holdings, that company placed a firm order for thirty of the airbuses with an option on twenty more. This by all accounts is an entirely private speculation. On the face of things at least Air Holdings is planning to finance the operation from its own resources. It has bought the aircraft at a launching price, somewhere between \$15 million and \$20 million apiece, and hopes that by 1973, when it takes delivery of the first of its aircraft, the going price will be higher and the market unsaturated.