

## No Recess for Government

WITH the long vacation hanging over the British Parliament, the Prime Minister safely tucked away in the Scilly Isles and the British economy showing real if small and much delayed signs of recovery, there will be a temptation in the next few weeks to suppose that there can be a moratorium on the problems of the British Government. To be sure, the Minister of Employment and Productivity as Mrs Barbara Castle is called is probably in for a busy summer, now that it is clear that the hopes of a clearer basis for regulating labour relations have been frustrated, but that may be seen as a kind of local difficulty. Certainly it is all too probable that the Government and its critics will cheerfully forget about the outstanding problems in the administration of science and technology in Britain. There are several reasons why this will be a great mistake. For one thing, it is now likely that the autumn will see yet another reshuffling of the government ministers, and that the energies of most government politicians will be bent to the prospect of the next general election, most probably within a year or thereabouts. That is not the best atmosphere for making the constructive reforms of the present machinery which circumstances require. Indeed, there is a danger that the needs of science and technology will once more be submerged in heady talk about the prospects of prosperity through technological revolution.

What needs to be done? For one thing, there are obvious changes in the machinery for spending money on science and technology. The Council for Scientific Policy is in danger of seeming and even being moribund, at a time when there has never been a stronger need of machinery for evolving a strategy for the relationship between universities and the research councils. What, for example, will be done to make sure that the university science courses are broadened and the basis for university entrance liberalized? What is to be done about postgraduate courses? Are there enough of them? Is it proper that an industrialized nation like Britain should still rely on undergraduate teaching for the training of its skilled people?

## Getting Off the Shelf

It is generally agreed that Oceanology '69 at Brighton in February was a great success. The new world of the oceans may have dawned earlier in the United States, with its vast defence-oriented hydro-space industry, but at least Britain could pride herself that she was not inactive. There were bold words from high places, ample evidence from the universities and

Is there nothing to be learned in Britain from the new thinking on the financing of university research which has been prominent in the United States and now in Canada (see page 560)? The Council for Scientific Policy began well, and asked a great many important questions with the publication of the reports of the committees under Swann, Jones and Dainton, but it seems uncommonly incapable of suggesting what should be done now. To be sure, it is always possible that the council is feeding the Department of Education and Science with a stream of constructive advice, but the minister is constitutionally not very powerful when it comes to persuading universities to change their ways. It would, in other words, be better if the responsibilities of the CSP for forward planning were transferred to the Science Research Council, which can operate more publicly, and if the ministry were instead provided with a single identifiable person to provide professional advice.

The other great need for a reform of the existing machinery is in the Cabinet Office, where the Central Advisory Council on Science and Technology (Sir Solly Zuckerman's apparatus) has a toehold at the centre of power but very little influence over the departments which spend most money on science and technology—the Ministries of Defence and Technology. The trouble here is no doubt inseparable from the difficulties of operating modern governments, but it is continually absurd that there should be a central body for developing policy which has no say worth listening to on how defence research should be organized. And what does the Central Advisory Council think about the success of the Ministry of Technology in diversifying the activities of the research establishments? What balance would it like to strike between the development of aircraft and the development of other forms of transport? Is telecommunications research in Britain properly organized and sufficient in scale? For that matter, what should be the balance of power between the Ministry of Technology and the Department of Education and Science on the financing of research? These are all questions which need to be answered.

industry that oceanography was being taken seriously and producing important results and, of course, the energy being put into the exploration of the continental shelf by the Institute of Geological Sciences is well known. But do British scientists have the tools for the job? To what extent can people with a good case for sea-time get it? And how quickly? This last is