

and that polytechnics could either develop along the lines of universities—eventually becoming much more closely associated with existing universities—or else they could provide more of the liberal arts or science type of education that would be supplied by the transformed colleges of education.

CONSERVATION

Voluntary Work for Nature

INDEPENDENCE has come to the gallant volunteers who have given up their weekends and holidays during the past eleven years to engage in such tasks as digging ditches and planting trees under the auspices of the Council for Nature. In future the Conservation Corps, as it is called, will be a part of the new British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) which was launched two weeks ago. The new body is the fruit of much deliberation on the problem of how to find the money to harness the energies of the volunteers, to undertake more of the field work that landowners and conservation organizations are clamouring for them to begin.

As far as the Conservation Corps was concerned, the Council for Nature was always hampered by its constitution as the collective voice of all the bodies concerned with conservation, with no executive or fund-raising powers. The last financial crisis of the corps was saved by a grant from the Jack and Mary Pie Trust of the Soil Association, but when this expired the need to raise funds to equip and organize the volunteer conservationists became acute. The BTCV, as a charitable trust, will be able to raise funds, and will soon launch its first appeal for £125,000.

The new trust will have expert advice from its general council, which when fully constituted will have members from industry, commerce, science, and youth and conservation organizations. As the work force of BTCV, the Conservation Corps should be able to extend its activities throughout Britain; in the past there has been a tendency for projects to cluster in South-East England. The numbers of volunteers, mostly sixth form, college and university students, although some are much older, have grown steadily since the first group began clearing the chalk grassland of Box Hill, Surrey, in 1959. Last December 14,000 people were engaged in practical conservation work under the aegis of the corps. European Conservation Year has brought a further acceleration in recruitment, and so far there have been more than 100 new volunteers each month.

The tasks to which these volunteers gave more than 6,000 man days last year range from laying nature trails to building bridges. They are also often called upon to remove scrub from habitats that have become overgrown and to clear debris from clogged rivers and ponds. Much of this work is done on behalf of the Nature Conservancy on National Nature Reserves, but the corps is also called upon by county naturalists' trusts, county councils, the National Trust, private landowners and other organizations interested in conservation. Under the umbrella of the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers the Conservation Corps is expected to take on more work, some of which will be in the hands of local groups to be set up as part of the expanded organization.

Parliament in Britain

Smokeless Fuel Supplies

THE possibility that smokeless fuels will be in short supply next winter seems to be a certain candidate for debate whenever the Minister of Technology answers questions. Last week it was the Paymaster General, Mr Harold Lever, who bore the brunt of some searching questions from both sides of the House, and his assessment of the situation did little to calm any fears. He warned that there may well be a tight situation next winter, but just how tight it will be depends on the weather and on how many gasworks are shut down.

To ease the situation, public authorities are being asked to step up the conversion of public buildings to other fuels, and some gasworks may get a reprieve, he said. Mr Lever refused to accept the suggestion put forward by Mr David Lane that the whole situation represents a shocking failure of forward planning on the part of the Ministry of Technology. "It represents no more than a hastening of the inevitable if we were to cease the antiquated process of carbonizing coal to produce gas," he said. But the hastening of the inevitable is being slowed down, because Mr Lever announced that he has asked the Gas Council to review its programme and a modest contribution can be expected from slowing down closures of gasworks which provide coke supplies. (Oral answers, April 27.)

Brain Drain

THE Scientists Appointments Service, a scheme designed to attract back to Britain scientists working or studying abroad, was finally closed down on March 31. The scheme came into operation in 1968, and it was run by five science institutes with financial backing from the Ministry of Technology. The reason for closing it down seems to be its lack of success. Mr Alan Williams, Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Technology, said that although 1,103 scientists had registered with the service during its two years of operation, 162 of whom eventually found employment in the UK, only 19 were placed directly through the Scientific Appointments Service. The service had received a grant of £10,766 from the Ministry of Technology. (Written answers, April 27.)

Oil Pollution

THE detection of those responsible for polluting the sea with oil is far from satisfactory, but given the practical difficulties and the present law, the procedures used in Britain are the best that can reasonably be expected. That is the opinion of Mr Goronwy Roberts, Minister of State, Board of Trade, given in answer to a question from Mr Alick Buchanan-Smith, who drew attention to the failure to identify the source of recent pollution on the East Coast of Scotland. Mr Roberts said, however, that legislation for strengthening the law and improving enforcement of it is in preparation at the moment.

As far as air pollution is concerned, Mr Anthony Greenwood, Minister of Housing and Local Government, said that since 1960, average low-level concentrations of sulphur dioxide in urban areas have fallen by about 33 per cent, and these trends are expected to continue. Mr Arthur Jones had asked what steps the ministry intends to take to control emissions of sulphurous and other noxious fumes. (Oral and written answers, April 27.)