OLD WORLD

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Aldermaston Decision

THE decision that the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at Aldermaston should be transferred from the Atomic Energy Authority to the Ministry of Defence, anticipated as long ago as April by the Rayner report, was announced on August 5 by Mr John Davies, the Minister for Trade and Industry. This brings to an end a period of great uncertainty at Aldermaston which goes back to the early sixties and the abandonment of the advanced strategic weapons systems then being developed in the United Kingdom—the Blue Streak missile and the warheads that were to have been fitted to the Skybolt air-to-ground missile. For the past few years, it has been increasingly apparent that if Aldermaston has a place anywhere in the British Government's arrangements for research and development, it is with the Ministry of Defence and not the Atomic Energy Authority.

According to the statements last week in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, the government expects that the necessary legislation to transfer the Aldermaston establishment to the Ministry of Defence will have been dealt with in time for the transfer to be complete by the summer of 1972. The government has promised to consult the staff and trade union representatives about how the transfer will affect people's jobs, and Lord Carrington, the Minister of Defence, said that "the general aim will be that the terms and conditions taken as a whole shall be no less favourable than those provided for in existing contracts". At present, something like 19 per cent of the expenditure at Aldermaston concerns projects which are not part of the military programme, and 10 per cent of this work is nuclear in character. The government has been at pains to emphasize that the transfer to the Ministry of Defence will not necessarily reduce the amount of non-military work carried out at Aldermaston, but in future, projects such as those undertaken for the development of the fast reactor programme, will be covered by contracts placed with Aldermaston by the Atomic Energy Authority or one of its dependants.

Mr Anthony Wedgwood Benn, previously responsible as Minister of Technology for the Atomic Energy Authority, complained that it would be dangerous to go against the example shown by most other countries in the West by putting the nuclear weapons research directly under the military, and that the transfer would in any case spoil opportunities for further diversifying the work of the establishment.

So far, there is very little to suggest how the remainder of the Atomic Energy Authority will be affected by the impending reorganization of government research establishments, although a statement last week did say that the government is considering "how best the electricity supply industry and the nuclear industry could be more closely involved in reactor research and development". This formula can, of course, mean anything from the transfer of the reactor development station at Winfrith to the Central Electricity Generating Board, to the amalgamation of the design group of the Atomic Energy Authority with the Central Electricity Generating Board. Now that the fuel manufacturing capacity of the authority has been embodied in British Nuclear Fuels Limited, the way would seem to be open for a daring administrator to bring the Atomic Energy Authority entirely to an end.

SCIENTISTS' PAY

Mighty McCall

MORE than 3,000 disgruntled government scientists gathered in Central Hall, Westminster, last Tuesday in the final meeting organized by the Institution of Professional Civil Servants to protest against the government's pay offer. The purpose of the meeting was to give point to the outrage that scientists in the Civil Service have been expressing about the recent pay award.

Mr William McCall, the general secretary of the IPCS, said that the meeting was the biggest in the history of the IPCS and that there were larger issues behind this dispute. Mr McCall complained that the government was taking advantage of the economic situation and of the extensive unemployment among scientists to depress the pay of scientists. The implications of the government's offer, added Mr McCall, spell disaster for the national economy.

Indirectly, 27,000 scientists are affected by the offer and of these 17,000 are being offered no pay increase (Table 1). Mr McCall claimed that the government's treatment of the pay claim fits into a determined policy to reduce the size of pay increases. The offer of the Civil Service Department, said Mr McCall, was a declaration of war—an attack on the living standards of scientists. No other group in Britain has this year been offered no increase at all, he said; the offer means a cut of 10 per cent in the living standards of scientists. Mr McCall went on to say that as the government employed 27 per cent of all scientists in Britain, its attitude will make the pay of scientists everywhere go down and the ability of the country to make science an attractive profession will be impaired.

Mr McCall also complained that the government has never turned its back so completely on arguments advanced by the IPCS—which does not augur well for the status of the scientist in Britain. The institution's interpretation of the report of the Pay Research Unit differs profoundly from that of the Civil Service Department. Mr McCall pointed out that after investigation by his office it was revealed that the average age of the "equivalent" scientist employed in industry was nine years younger than in the Civil Service. This younger age reflected the better chances of promotion of a man in industry and if nine incre-

Table 1 The IPCS Claim and the Government's Offer

Numbers involved	Present scale	IPCS claim	Government offer
Principal Scientific Officer			
1,700	3,902 max	4,208 (7.8%)	nil
	2,820 min	3,174 (12.6%)	
Senior Scientific Officer			
1,200	2,703	3,398 (25.6%)	nil
	2,193	2,483 (13.2%)	
Scientific Officer			
600	1,982	2,077 (4.8%)	2.2%
	1,162	1,486 (27.9%)	9.7%
Chief Experimental Officer			
300	3,873	4,208 (8.6%)	nil
	3,258	3,714 (14.0%)	
Senior Experimental Officer			
2,100	3,099	3,396 (9.6%)	nil
	2,529	2,849 (12.7%)	
Experimental Officer			
3,900	2,177	2,583 (18.6%)	nil
	1,725	1,973 (14.4%)	
Assistant Experimental Officer			
1,500	1,578	2,077 (31.6%)	nil
	741	1,196 (26.4%)	9.9%
Senior Scientific Assistant			
1,200	1,777	2,077 (16.9%)	nil
	1,367	1,579 (15.5%)	2.4%
Scientific Assistant			
4,500	1,253	1,450 (15.7%)	5.7%
	490	550 (12.2%)	7.1%