

OLD WORLD

Nuclear Power: Weinstock at the Helm

BRITAIN'S nuclear design and construction industry has finally been restructured with Sir Arnold Weinstock ultimately in charge.

Under the government's proposals, a new company is to be formed, 50 per cent of which will be owned by Sir Arnold Weinstock's General Electric Company, 35 per cent by a shareholding company into which other members of Britain's existing nuclear power industry can buy, and 15 per cent by the government held through the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority.

It is clear where the power is to lie. Mr. Peter Walker, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, announcing the government's decision in the House of Commons last week said that GEC will "also play a supervisory role on a basis agreed with the main board of the new company". GEC will be paid for its services.

This arrangement is different in name from that which the government considered earlier this year when there was talk of awarding a management contract to someone like GEC. It is, however, unlikely to prove different in practice. Mr Tom Boardman, giving evidence to the Select Committee on Science and Technology this week, made it plain that GEC will provide the management of the new company which is to have a two tier structure. The chief board will be appointed jointly by GEC and the government. It in turn will appoint a managing board to actually run the new company.

The new £10 million organization will be chaired by Lord Aldington, GEC's deputy chairman, with Lord McFadzean, currently chairman of British Insulated Callendar's Cables as deputy chairman. A chief executive has yet to be appointed. Although existing companies in the nuclear design and construction industry can buy into the shareholding company that, with GEC and the government, will own the new company, they will not be able to directly influence the management.

This reorganization, which follows the announcement made last August that the nuclear power industry was to be concentrated in one bloc, is the first stage in ending the uncertainty that has hung over the industry for the past two years. Later this month Mr Walker is expected to announce the membership of the Nuclear Power Board which will advise him on the choice of reactor system. Its membership is expected to

include representatives from the UKAEA, the Central Electricity Generating Board, the Electricity Council and government scientists.

Mr Walker told the Commons that the consultations that have taken place over



Sir Arnold Weinstock

the past six months "have confirmed strongly the government's view that there should be a single nuclear company which will use the skills and experience of the existing industry".

The radical differences between the new company and the old consortia (British Nuclear Design and Construction and The Nuclear Power Group) will be that the new company will have

a single strong management, and will be responsible only for the design and construction of the nuclear steam supply systems—in other words the reactor itself. Turbogenerators and other plant will be supplied by other contractors.

Although the government will only have a 15 per cent holding in the new company it will retain "special rights in certain matters where the public interest is closely involved", Mr Walker said. "These would include the formation of international links and securing that an open purchasing policy is pursued in order that neither the company's shareholders nor GEC subsidiaries should obtain preferential treatment."

The existing work of the nuclear consortia will be taken over by the new company "under arrangements to be agreed". The position of British Nuclear Fuels in the new set up is not entirely clear. Mr. Walker said that the fuel company "will be closely associated with the new company in marketing and exploiting reactor systems and their fuel", but its precise relationship has not yet been defined. Mr Boardman told the select committee that a joint marketing company may be formed by BNFL and the new company.

Although the new organization is expected to begin operations soon, and although the Nuclear Power Board should convene and produce its advice for Mr Walker comparatively quickly, new nuclear power station orders are unlikely before next year.

US/USSR

All Aboard the Glomar

THE Soviet Union is to collaborate with the United States in a deep sea drilling project using the Glomar Challenger. This latest development in Soviet-United States cooperation follows last May's open ended agreement on scientific cooperation (see also page 294).

The Soviet Union has been interested in sea bed exploration for some time, and the current five-year plan (see *Pravda*, February 14, 1971) provides support for such projects. Until now, however, these have only involved offshore exploration for oil and minerals in the Caspian and Black Seas and on the eastern coast of the Soviet Union.

Under the new agreement the Soviet Union will contribute \$1 million a year (ten per cent of the total cost) to the Deep Sea Drilling Project, and Soviet

scientists will have facilities for further research work carried out by the Glomar Challenger.

To date the Deep Sea Drilling Project has been based on JOIDES, a consortium of five United States oceanographic institutions. Under the new agreement the Institute of Oceanology of the Soviet Academy of Sciences will represent the Soviet Union as the sixth member of the consortium.

Although new collaborative projects are planned under last May's agreement, some of which, for example, the Bering Meteorological project (see *Nature*, 241, 420; 1973) have already taken place, this entry of the Soviet Union into existing United States work seems an unprecedented move by the Soviet planners. Soviet scientists have, however, shown considerable interest in the voyages of the Glomar Challenger for some time, and regular reports of her movements and findings have appeared in *Priroda*.