says that a prospective study is in the offing and that 2,4,5-T would almost certainly be one of the herbicides investigated.

The report ducks one issue, however, that of trade union involvement in its decisions. The unions would prefer the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) — where the unions are included on various committees — to be responsible for assessing herbicide safety. Kilpatrick says that this is a matter for ministers to decide. But it seems likely that the unions will be involved in planning the prospective epidemiological study on herbicides. It remains to be seen, however, whether participation on this *ad hoc* basis will satisfy them. Despite the reassuring conclusions of the advisory committee's report, the recent decision by the Trades Union Congress to instruct its members not to handle any 2,4,5-T imported into Britain stands for the time being. **Alastair Hay**

UK forestry policy

Research wanted

British policy on forestry research came in for a drubbing just before Christmas in a critical report from the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology. And the annual report of the Forestry Commission, the public agency responsible for publicly-owned forests, did little to answer the criticisms when it appeared a few days later.

The select committee's chief complaint is that there is no coordinated policy on forestry research. The Forestry Commission is accused of being too concerned with wood production to bother promoting less obvious areas of research, so that the Natural Environment Research Council has been left to support "fundamental and strategic research" — a responsibility which it has shouldered "lightly", according to the committee.

The committee asks that the Forestry Commission should mend its ways by appointing a chief scientist, and that the Advisory Board for the Research Councils should decide which of the two obvious candidates — the Natural Environment Research Council and the Agricultural Research Council — should be responsible for longer-term research. The commission should also be urged to provide advisory services for the owners of private woodlands much in the spirit in which the Agricultural Advisory Services help private farmers to tackle agricultural problems.

The commission's own account of the past year (to March 1980) confirms a preoccupation with the production of wood and in this respect some of the results are impressive. Machinery and pesticides have made the planting of trees a more certain business, with obvious benefits to production costs. The development of local seed supplies, the search for more productive species and for the avoidance of damage by high winds and the control of pests and forest diseases remain the mainstays of the commission's research.

British forestry is a controversial business with the commission frequently pilloried for its preoccupation with conifer plantations. The select committee makes a case for the preservation and renewal of often ancient broad-leaved woodlands, suggesting local authorities as suitable custodians. There is a plea for research to throw light on the more effective planning of land use.

The implementation of many of the select committee's recommendations will cost money — both for reorganization and for an increase in volume of some areas of research. The current level of forestry research funding of just under £5 million for the past year is not generous when compared with the current value of the forest estate of £500 million. But recognizing that an increase in public funds is unlikely, the committee suggests that extra revenue could be created by a 0.1 per cent levy on imported timber and wood products, raising £2.75 million a year.

There is little prospect that extra funds could be found in the Forestry Commission's profits. The commission acknowledges that over the next three years it is unlikely to make the financial target of 3 per cent a year in real terms required of it by the British government. In this respect, the Forestry Commission has yet to make an effective response to the criticisim of its financial operations by the Treasury in 1972. **Judy Redfearn**

Lords look ahead

The House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology will study scientific advice to government in its next inquiry. The idea came from Lord Todd, chairman of the committee. The committee will consider whether the post of chief scientific adviser to the government, which was abandoned in 1974, should be reinstated and whether responsibility for science should be removed from the Department of Education and Science.

UK clinical research

Future not so rosy

Celebrating their fiftieth anniversary in London last month, members of the Medical Research Society were not altogether optimistic about the future. One of the principal fears, aired at the day-long symposium on the organization of medical research, was the declining ability of clinical departments to attract and train the people to keep them in the front line of research.

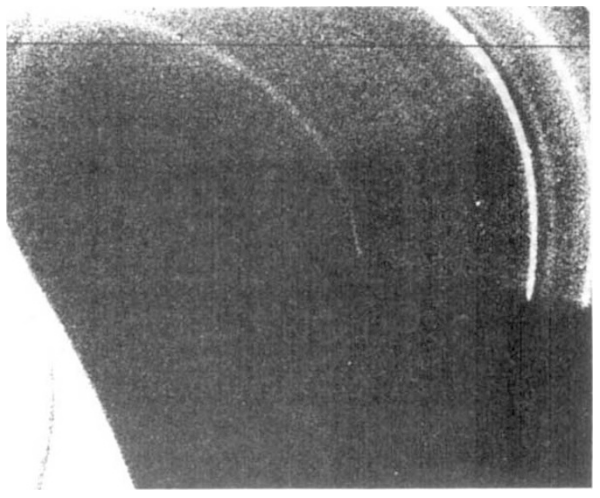
Part of the problem is to provide the money and status to keep non-clinical research workers in clinical laboratories, where their knowledge and expertise is essential. Dr J. L. Gowans, secretary of the Medical Research Council (MRC) pointed out that although MRC grants can sometimes cover the costs of such people, the universities should really be providing them with permanent jobs.

Professor W. S. Peart of St Mary's Hospital Medical School, London, said that in hard times, hard choices must be made in medical schools between technical staff and academic staff — it may be necessary to take on a new postdoctoral fellow rather than a lecturer.

The other side of the problem is the difficulty of providing high quality scientific training for medically qualified staff without disrupting the smooth course of their clinical careers. Professor Peart was disturbed by the lack of young people entering academic clinical research.

The continuing revolution in biology will increase the need to unite basic and applied research on man. Dr S. Brenner, director of the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology in Cambridge, pointed out that human molecular and cell biology, now in its infancy, will become the essential interface. In twenty-five years, he said, it will be as essential for researchers in pathology, cardiology and so on to have a thorough knowledge of cell and molecular biology as it is now for clinical endocrinologists to know their steroid chemistry. **Mary Lindley**

New rings for old



Claims from ground-based astronomers that Saturn has an innermost D ring, stretching from the bright C ring down to the planet's cloud tops, were apparently disproved by Pioneer 11 in 1979. But this image from Voyager 1, taken soon after its encounter with Saturn last November, reveals an inner ring, complete with fine structure, between the planet (bottom left) and the C ring (top right). Here, Saturn's shadow falls across the ring, which is apparently too faint to be detectable from Earth.

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