

THE NEW Financial Times POWER

RECENT events in the Middle East have underlined the dangers implicit in too absolute a dependence on oil, and the Chancellor's hint this week of a speeding-up in the original programme of nuclear energy development reflects what must have been a widespread reaction to the new situation. In fact, research into the possibilities of development had reached a point, well before the emergence of the Suez crisis, where expansion of the original programme announced at the beginning of last year had become both practicable and desirable. A number of improvements, particularly in the design of heat exchangers, had vastly increased the potential operating efficiency of the Calder Hall type of reactor. Progress in work on the more advanced second- and third-stage reactors had been more rapid and fruitful than was originally hoped. It seemed possible that the total capacity of the 12 stations to be built in the first stage of the nuclear energy programme might be double that originally forecast.

Details of the new programme are to be announced on Monday week, following the publication of the first orders for nuclear power stations to be placed with private firms by the Central Electricity Authority. This will probably not only confirm the considerable increase in output now made possible, but significantly increase the size of the programme. Its cost will inevitably rise, but this is hardly a matter about which anyone is likely to quibble.

Britain Ahead

The country is exceedingly fortunate in the fact that the work of the Atomic Energy Authority and of the firms which are now operating in conjunction with it has proceeded so fruitfully. A rapid expansion in the nuclear energy programme—except on an impossibly uneconomic basis—is not merely a matter of spending more money. It waits on the issue of research into technological problems, problems which appear to have been overcome in this country with a success which is remarkable when compared with the experience of our U.S. competitors. The Calder Hall reactor has now been developed to the point where it can produce much more power more cheaply, on the large scale and the small, for domestic use and for export. The signs are that Britain is similarly ahead of other countries in the design of workable second- and third-stage reactors. If this lead is to be maintained, it will no longer be possible to blink plain economic facts. We must pay nuclear scientists and engineers enough to stop the steady flow across the Atlantic.