

have provided a basis for a new contract. Because of that the C.C.H.M.S. had not proposed any action but had told its negotiators to underpin the progress already made. It had been claimed that the consultants' representatives had demanded a final Government statement. That had not been so. What had happened was that when the negotiators had asked if they could see on paper how far agreement had been reached Dr. Owen had rightly decided to consult with colleagues. The matter had ended up in the Cabinet and the outcome had been the Government's December proposals for a new consultant contract (4 January, p. 45).

The character of the Owen Working Party had been changed on 20 December. At that meeting, a new contract, in some detail, had been put across the table by the Government some twenty minutes before the actual start of discussions. The suggestion had been made to the profession's negotiators that the contract should be discussed with their colleagues. The negotiators, however, had disagreed. The facts were that what Mrs. Castle had meant by discussion or negotiation referred only to some points of detail. The principles in that contract had not been negotiable. Dr. C. E. Astley, the Chairman of the C.C.H.M.S., had realized that they were virtually the same principles which had been rejected already by the consultants in a proper constitutional manner. But the Secretary of State said that if the profession did not like the contract she would not impose it and that the Owen Working Party would have been an exercise that had failed.

So the negotiators had been left with the alternative of an unacceptable contract or going back to the beginning. The negotiators had agreed that the time had arrived—after all the debate—to show that her reaction had not been good enough and that consultants would have to work to their contracts. That decision had been supported by the Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association.

Mr. Lewin said, however, that he wanted to make it clear that right up until the last moment Dr. Astley and the President of the H.C.S.A., short of seeking a confrontation, had been asking for the document to be left on the table for full discussion. They had not wanted it sent out to the profession until the proper negotiating procedure had been gone through because nobody wanted a confrontation. The Government had not agreed.

Responsible Action

"I believe that your colleagues acted responsibly and with restraint," continued Mr. Lewin, "but when it was clear how matters were going, they took action to which I do not think at that time there was any alternative." There had been exceptional support for that action. Over 90% of hospital medical committees in England had almost unanimously rejected the contract. If there had been an attempt to divide the consultants it had not succeeded, and all concerned were gratified by the resolution of the General Medical Services Committee to support the consultants' action. Similarly the hospital junior staff, even though they had been gaining an improved contract for themselves, had said immediately that it in no way altered their support for senior colleagues. "We have a situation today in which we are united in a way that has not been seen for a very long time," concluded the Chairman. "But it is

Doctors in Society

For over 20 years the B.M.A. has had an ad hoc arrangement with other professional associations such as the Bar Council, the Law Society, and the British Dental Association to collaborate on matters of common interest. During the Council meeting last week Mr. Lewin reported on recent moves to improve co-operation among the professions.

After the A.R.M. in Hull last year the President, Sir Ronald Tunbridge, and Mr. Lewin had begun discussions with Sir Frederick Catherwood, Director of the British Institute of Management. They had not been concerned with supporting the society for the middle classes, nor in launching a political body. "Sir Frederick's view," stated Mr. Lewin, "is that this country is essentially a knowledge-based society, and the people who give that knowledge are a relatively compact group of professions, faculties, and institutes, who are at present largely ignored when decisions are made affecting the country."

For some months there had been discussions among bodies such as the B.M.A. and the Royal College of Surgeons, and the professional organizations representing accountants, the physicists, chemists, engineers, architects, and so on. "Some 19 bodies have been involved," Mr. Lewin declared, "and Sir Frederick Catherwood wants to develop a professional forum, starting, perhaps, with those 19 bodies, which would meet in various working parties. Such a body would carry authority by its very membership and the Government would obviously listen to its views as would the public. He sees it as preparing papers and documents on such matters as pollution, the recycling of waste products, and so forth."

Mr. Lewin commented that if a medical voice was needed on such matters, the B.M.A. had its Board of Science and Education. Nevertheless, the B.M.A. would probably be much more interested in some of the other issues involved, such as the preservation of professional independence and freedom to practise. There was a case, too, for the professions to act as a strong economic unit which could demand to be heard when matters of broad Government policy affecting society were being decided. Mr. Lewin promised to keep the Council informed of further developments.

our job to reach solutions, and I am delighted we now see in the letter from the Secretary of State a possible formula by which we can take up further discussions."

JUNIOR STAFF CONTRACT

Referring to the junior doctors' contract, Mr. Lewin said the advance which had been made in getting acceptance by the Government of a 40-hour standard contract was welcomed. The juniors were realistic, however, and realized there were several hurdles yet to be got over. But in his view they were on the right lines.

Debate on Hospital Staff Contracts

Dr. C. E. ASTLEY endorsed the Chairman's remarks. He reported that at its recent meeting, his committee had decided that the best short-term course, in the interests of unity among consultants, would be to try to negotiate a better deal on the present contract, which might be taken into account by the Review Body in its April review. There was no question of consultants calling off their work to contract until the committee was satisfied about the Government's good faith, he concluded.

Juniors' Contract

Dr. I. MCKIM THOMPSON, Secretary, Hospital Junior Staffs Group Council, informed the Council that the juniors had established a

formula with the Secretary of State which had been agreed (18 January, p. 159). The agreement was that from 1 October 1975, new contracts would be introduced with a basic salary that would relate to standard working hours of 40 per week. Of course, he said, where service or education needs required normal working hours would be longer, though naturally the Group Council was keen to ensure that excessive working hours were reduced so far as possible.

The new contract had been approved by the Joint Negotiating Committee on 16 January, and it would be priced by the Review Body, with profession and Government free to give separate evidence. The Group Council's evidence would be completed shortly and would fall into two sections—the arrangements for remuneration between 1 April and 30 September 1975, and a submission for revised salaries based on the new contract to operate from 1 October. The three-month delay from 1 July to 30 September was due to the fact that it would not be possible administratively to prepare the new contracts in a shorter time. Dr. McKim Thompson added that the terms of the contract had been fully cleared by the C.C.H.M.S., the Joint Negotiating Committee, and the Council for Postgraduate Medical Education. It also had the blessing of the Joint Consultants Committee. Other substantial improvements on which formal agreement was likely were the exchange of contracts procedure, job descriptions, improved periods of notice, the end of unlawful deductions from salary, the elimination of the time qualification for the