

By NICHOLAS BAGNALL

THE loud sighs of relief which greeted Mrs. Thatcher, Education Secretary, last month, when she was able to announce that the schools had escaped Mr. Barber's cuts, will be muted on Tuesday. They may even give place to groans.

For on Tuesday the local authorities meet to hear the Minister for the Environment tell them how much—or how little—they are likely to get in the way of central grant over the next two years or so. Informal negotiations have been going on for some time.

The result, confidently predicted, will be that the counties and the boroughs will have either to raise a great deal more from the rates to make up for inadequacies in the supporting grant, or to cut back on the services they are offering. In education particularly, the second of these two alternatives has already been in operation for some years.

The trouble is that education is not an easy thing in which to economise. The children are there, the law says they have to be educated, and their teachers have to be paid. And since the basic costs of the operation have been inescapably rising every year, the only things which can be cut back on are the marginal ones. Like books.

Last week's disclosure by the publishers and the equipment-makers that the proportion of the budget spent on books is falling should therefore surprise no one. The situation is actually worse than the bare percentages—three per cent. of local budgets spent on books and equipment in 1961, 2.6 per cent. in 1968—would suggest.

Schoolchildren are now getting fewer books to read than they had nine years ago.

There is a particular reason for this state of affairs is extremely embarrassing for Mrs. Thatcher. Ever since she took office she has been deeply conscious of having started off on the wrong foot.

Notorious Circular 10/70, the anti-comprehensive local authority hook on the Government, was widely regarded as meaning that she was a militant anti-comprehensive which is by no means the fact her views on the

Cash crisis for schools

organisation of schools, and on the respective priorities to be given to bright children and dull ones, are obscure; and it is plain that she has not given the major part of her mind to such problems as school organisation or parental choice.

What she does care about are educational techniques, an interest which she again underlined in her important speech—the best she has made yet—to the Association of Education Committees at Scarborough a week or two back.

Afterwards she was applauded for having rescued the building programme and for her promise of more new primary schools. Next week's meeting about the rate support grant will in effect determine what goes on in those buildings. But the point is that the liberal-minded techniques in

which Mrs. Thatcher is rightly interested require more books per pupil, and more expensive equipment, than the methods they are replacing.

Today's liberal-minded teacher does not depend on single texts, but on a decent classroom reference library.

It looks as though the onus of carrying on this movement towards more liberal teaching methods, comparatively expensive as they are, will have increasingly to fall on the ratepayer rather than on the taxpayer: a shift which can be regarded as being in line with Conservative devolutionary policies in general.

The same line can be detected when one comes to higher education, which is where the shoe is going to pinch the hardest in the next ten years.



Mrs. Thatcher

At present the polytechnics, which official policy regards as being "different from but equal to" the universities, are poorly off. For example, figures lately worked out by the National Union of Students show that a polytechnic is able to spend £9 per student on library books where a university can spend £20; polytechnic libraries provide an average of 14 books per student, university libraries 150.

These simple figures are in themselves enough, one might have thought, to make nonsense of the binary policy ("equal but different") for higher education which the Government has inherited from the Socialists. Yet the only clear thing which Mrs.

Thatcher has said so far about the expansion of higher education is that the binary policy will remain.

In this, Mrs. Thatcher may expect an informed and growing body of opposition from dons and lecturers on both sides of the binary divide.

Various solutions are proposed to bring the halves together in a single administrative unit, perhaps regionally. They ought to attract Mrs. Thatcher, who knows that the best way of meeting the demands for higher education without actually breaking the bank is to make the system more efficient. So far, at any rate, they seem to have fallen on deaf ears.

Meanwhile, some gloom impends as the University Grants Committee prepares its next set of quinquennial grants. One way of keeping the grants within bounds, which the Vice Chancellors have been pleading for some years, is to allow the universities to charge more realistic tuition fees, which would then fall on local authorities via student grants. This, again, should appeal to Tory devolutionists. But, with the local authorities already squeezed, the prospects here are not too good either. All we can be sure of is that the universities can expect more of what a leading Oxford don calls "the Nipcheese policy."

NEW M.R.A. SPLIT IN EUROPE

By PETER GILL

MORAL Re-Armament, the militant Christian movement which is already divided against itself in the United States and Canada, is now known to be in deep trouble in Europe.

In both the new and the old world, the issue is the same. Groups of young M.R.A. workers have abandoned the traditional asceticism of the movement in favour of a more secular approach to gaining converts. They no longer emphasise M.R.A.'s four standards of "absolute purity, absolute honesty, absolute unselfishness and absolute love."

The youthful exponents of the fresh approach have incorporated themselves in the United States as a new educational trust called "Up With People." Under this banner they send moralising musical shows on world tours. For further finance for the group, M.R.A. has sold

all its offices outside New York. The 32-acre campus at Mackinac College on Lake Huron, near the Canadian border, is up for sale at more than £3 million.

Leaders of M.R.A. in Britain locate the beginning of this split in the death of Peter Howard, their last truly forceful leader, in 1965. Kenneth Belden, a member of the Council of Management here, said to Close-Up: "With the loss of a man of Howard's stature, you are bound to have people going off on their own tack. But if it is a very tragic road that Up With People has taken."

In Britain, M.R.A. has icily resisted the blandishments of the newcomers. When an Up With People musical company toured the country in May this year and was feted at Claridges by Walter Annenberg, the American Ambassador, there was no M.R.A. welcome. "We had no contact with them at all," said Kenneth Belden.

But both Denmark and Germany have succumbed. Boards of management there have

voted to abandon M.R.A. orthodoxy and to pursue the new approach.

Danish M.R.A. announced in September its intention to sell its headquarters at 32D Strandvejen, in Copenhagen. The proceeds, it is suspected, will go to support the musical tours run by Up With People.

Keld Joergensen, M.R.A.'s deputy chairman in Denmark until 1968, explained that legally the board was entitled to sell the property. But morally, he added, it was acting against the stipulated objectives of the organisation.

In Germany, M.R.A. work is described by European leaders of the movement as being "at a standstill." The Bonn centre, a three-storey house in Petersburg Strasse, has been sold to the Springer Press group as offices for two newspapers and a news service. Money from the sale has gone, according to M.R.A. sources, in part to honouring debts incurred by the Up With People musicals and in part to establishing a new training

centre on the site of a disused army camp in Bavaria. Now, this, too, has been closed.

M.R.A. hard-liners are not taking these setbacks meekly. Almost 140 protests, from Norway and Sweden as well as from Denmark, have been lodged with the Up With People leadership in Copenhagen. And in Germany, a national assembly next month will gather between 200 and 300 of the M.R.A. old guard to plan a new offensive.

The gloom felt by European leaders of M.R.A. over the current situation is increased by the failure of Up With People to take proper root. "It's fizzled out," said Mr. Belden. "There are now no headquarters and no staff in Germany. We're going to have to start again from the beginning."

He added: "The whole business has been quite harrowing for us in recent months. There is no pleasure seeing part of a great worldwide organisation going off the road like this."