

Doubts ended on council's future

# Lawson pushes new-look NEDC to concentrate on specific issues

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By Derek Harris, Commercial Editor

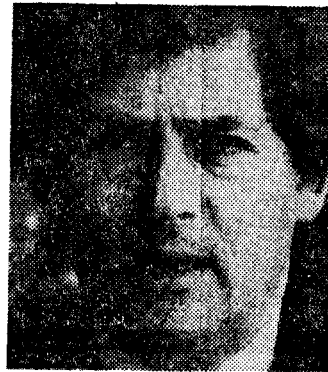
The National Economic Development Council, whose future was in doubt the during the last government, is to maintain its role but with a new emphasis on tackling specific issues.

The new-look Neddy, now the one forum for regular meetings of government, employers and trade union leaders, was launched yesterday at its first meeting since the election. Mr Nigel Lawson, the Chancellor who was in the chair, brought up as the first issue the role of the organization. Mr Lawson, like his predecessor, Sir Geoffrey Howe, did not want the council to get bogged down on macro-economic issues with the participants delivering well-rehearsed positions.

But he stilled any remaining doubt on the broad future of the council. In the last government, some ministers had raised questions about its usefulness and at one point it was believed that the Prime Minister was less than happy about its operations and some of the results of its deliberations.

There have also been long-running demands from some unions for the Trade Union Congress to pull out of all discussions with the Conservatives.

Mr Lawson's criticism of macro-economic issues provoked both the TUC and the Confederation of British Industry to argue for some such issues to be considered. But the meeting, described as amicable,



Lawson: "Valuable work"

reached a broad measure of agreement that the emphasis would be on achieving useful work rather than slipping into sterile arguments.

Mr Lawson said that a couple

or so macro-economic issues would be right although there were also calendar developments, such as the Budget, which naturally called for wider-ranging discussions.

The TUC successfully pressed for the issue of unemployment to be pursued. An investigation into where new jobs are likely to come from, suggested earlier by Sir Geoffrey Howe, is to be carried out.

The National Economic Development Office, Neddy's research arm - is to discuss with the Government, the TUC and CBI ways of tackling the question.

The CBI, though supporting the Chancellor's approach and calling for less Nedo paperwork, urged further investigation of the problem of Britain's competitiveness.

Mr Lawson emphasised the valued industrial work which the council did and particularly that which sprang from dealing with well-identified, clear questions.

Mr Lawson emphasised the value of work done by the sector working parties, the "little Neddies." He hoped government ministers would become increasingly involved in their work.

A number of new faces will effect Neddy's deliberations. Apart from Mr Lawson in his new role, the government side now includes, Sir Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Education and Science; Mr Peter Walker, Secretary of State for Energy; and Mr Cecil Parkinson, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.