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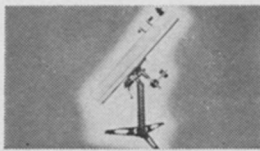
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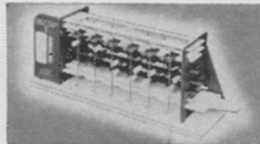
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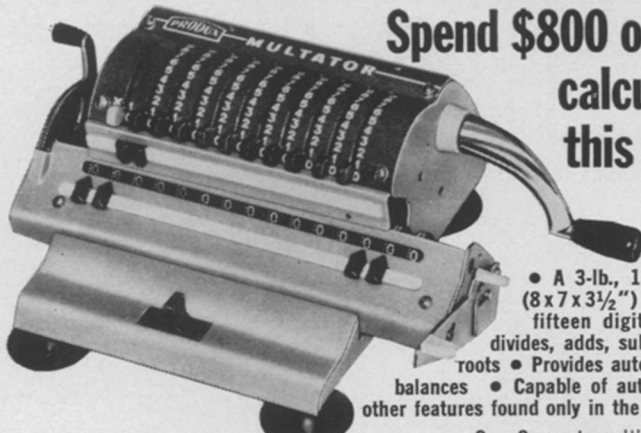
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MHD

Support for a tarnished dream

Magnetohydrodynamics (MHD) is an electricity-generating process trying to happen—commercially. Both in the U.S. and abroad (see p. 14) the technique promises more efficient power by passing a stream of hot gas through a magnetic field, eliminating turbines.

But MHD has had rough going (SN: 1/6/68, p. 5). Since it was first seriously proposed about 10 years ago as a candidate for electric power production, research in it has tapered off; major experimenters such as Westinghouse and General Electric have nearly quit the field, leaving Avco Corp., Everett, Mass., as its only staunch industrial supporter.

Last week MHD received a reprieve—in the form of a Government report which a few years ago would have been regarded as a setback.

A panel of the Office of Science and Technology headed by Louis H. Roddis, chairman of Consolidated Edison Co., New York, recommends \$2 million a year in Federal funds for research and development in the field. Industry is expected to supply an equal amount. In addition, the money is to be spent in further research and development rather than for the construction of a pilot plant.

Because coal is a so-called dirty fuel, producing air pollutants and corrosive contaminants, previous plans were to go ahead with the construction of a 25- to 30-megawatt MHD pilot plant which would burn a cleaner fuel, such as natural gas or oil. Simultaneously, research would be conducted on perfecting a coal-fired generator. But the panel wants the coal generator perfected first so that it will know that MHD can work using coal. This means delaying a pilot plant for at least three years.

Although disappointed at the funding recommendations, Dr. William Jackson, principal research scientist at Avco, takes heart from the report in general, especially the statement that ". . . the panel does not expect MHD to continue at any appreciable and useful level unless the Government provides the major support."

"For them to say that is important indeed," Dr. Jackson says, "because no one in the Federal Government has been willing to pick up MHD. It's been batted around from the railroads, to Health, Education and Welfare, to Interior, to the Federal Power Commission, to TVA. But here's a respected panel that advocates that the Government pick up the initiative and a large share of the tab." ◇

