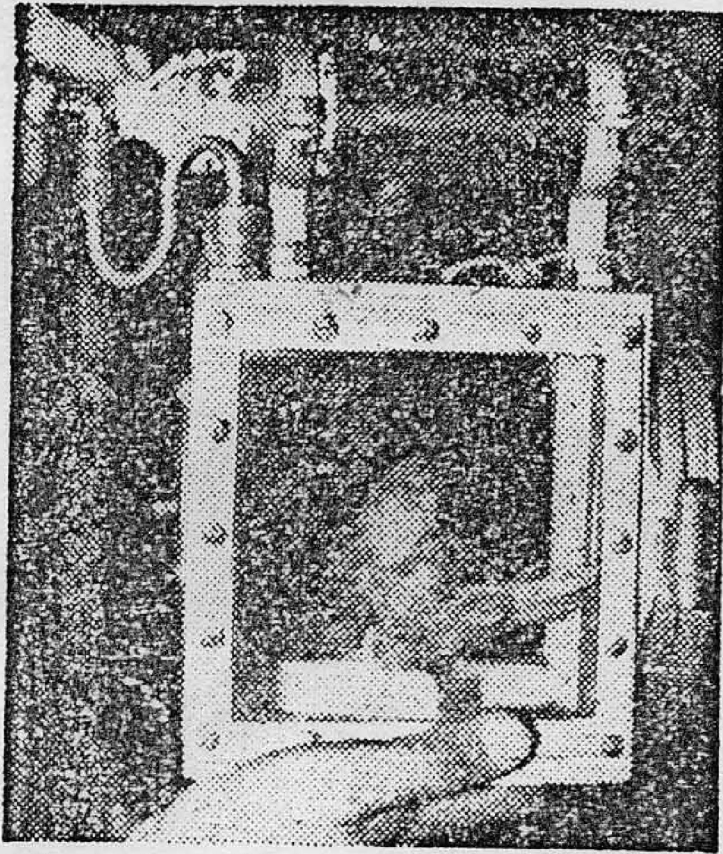


SAFETY



The miners' friendly trouble-sniffer

Passing out of the pit canary?

THE humble canary, centuries-old friend of Britain's miners in times of danger, looks like being knocked off his perch by the micro-chip revolution.

What's ruffled his feathers is a new experimental gadget designed to replace his job of "sniffing out" lethal carbon monoxide fumes underground.

The National Coal Board has at least two canaries at each of its 219 collieries. They pass out when they smell gas, but are quickly revived by oxygen.

And until recently man had unsuccessfully tried many times to find a machine as reliable as the canary in detecting the gases after fires or explosions.

Now exhaustive tests are being made at a Nottingham colliery on a new hand-held detector called EMCOR (East Midlands Carbon Monoxide Recorder). This relies on electronic cells to give instant read-outs.

An N.C.B. spokesman said: "Like the canary, the system must be infallible."

PETER OLIVER