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Prospect for Youth

AS man begins to reach for the stars the failings of his forebears not only persist but often seem to worsen, so vast can be their influence on human affairs. And of all man's failings today that of mismanagement is among the most apparent and least forgivable. In terms of money and brains nations consort and collaborate, plan and provide, work massively and closely together, re-appraise and reorientate with unceasing vigilance—all with the object of mutual defence. Yet suddenly the great and shining venture becomes the football of politicians, arousing contempt, anger and recrimination. The axe of cancellation falls before the eyes of the world—eyes that may express either shock or cynicism, but from which anxiety or fear is never absent.

As cancellation succeeds cancellation faith in those empowered to govern and employed to guide inevitably sinks. Nor is it merely the intrinsic waste which appals: it is the effect upon the young people and the young nations, who look for leadership and singlemindedness and who too often observe muddled thinking and double thinking.

These reflections are prompted, not by any particular cancellation, but by a letter just received from a reader—a schoolmaster, the depth of whose concern is evident. He writes: "Quite a few of our boys, when leaving school, go into the RAF, and when a boy has come for advice and has expressed an interest in a flying career, I have never hesitated to encourage him to enter the Service. It is only recently, however, that we have begun to emerge from the shadow cast by the Sandys Defence Policy Statement of some years ago, which made many promising boys decide that the Air Force offered them no future. Now this Skybolt decision threatens to repeat the damage. This absence of a clear-cut, well-thought-out and consistent defence policy has the same enervating effect on the Services as the 'stop-go' economic policies have had on the business world. Pious sentiments expressing the Minister of Defence's confidence in a 'great future' for the RAF will carry little conviction at this stage."

No Comfort

This schoolmaster appeals for our assistance in counteracting "these demoralizing tendencies." The only reassurance we are able to give is the belief that, Skybolt or no Skybolt, so long as armaments exist there will be air forces, and that so long as air forces exist there will be manned aeroplanes or vehicles of some kind. That manned aircraft will form "an important part" of US air defence at least until 1980 has been publicly declared by Mr Eugene Zuckert, US Secretary of the Air Force. Mr Zuckert has said that the B-52 "should carry us through this decade, and then there will be something to follow it that will be flown by men." This probably means some development of Dyna-Soar, akin to the type of craft now being studied as possible RAF equipment, and referred to under the title "Roundels in Space?" in this journal of November 29 last.

Although these beliefs may be reassuring to a section of our youth they can come as no comfort. Our greatest joy as the new year enters would be to offer the youngsters the prospect of universal disarmament; for it is only necessary to read this journal from week to week to appreciate that, unless this is achieved, the prospect for youth is a fearful one.