

DEBATING AIRLINE POLICY (continued from page 365)

explanation of the arrangements being made for writing off the corporation's deficit and for the contingency allowance. To some people, he said, the proposal would look like paying off a deficit in advance of events. He asked under what powers the Minister had made his air transport policy statement. This policy meant that, if the independents went to the ATLB and obtained approval, the Minister was inciting BEA to appeal against the decision and he was saying in advance that he would grant that appeal. He was,



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in effect, abandoning his own quasi-judicial status as Minister and removing the independent status of the Board. The Minister had given in to the pressure of his own back-benchers to do away with the competitive element and to return to monopoly.

MR JOHN STONEHOUSE, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Aviation (Lab, Wednesbury), said that for the past five years

both corporations and independents had operated under a "miasma of doubt and uncertainty." This had inhibited the successful development of British air transport, had resulted in inefficiency and had wasted the time of executives and others in meaningless appeals and litigation. Since the passing of the Licensing Act the air transport industry had staggered from one *ad hoc* decision to another, never quite knowing what to do for the best. Airline executives had been spending more time preparing for quasi-judicial proceedings than actually running their businesses and the appeals and counter-appeals had embittered relations in the industry.

An attempt had been made in the five years since the Act to build up a case law, but this had not worked because the ATLB had been given only a vague policy directive which could be interpreted in almost any way. After all the granting of licences and hearings of appeals the Government had often failed to get the traffic rights from foreign administrations. There were two interpretations of this situation. One that the concessions demanded were too great and the other was that the previous Government had failed to press the negotiations with enough vigour. In the first case the situations could have been anticipated and whatever conclusion was drawn the previous Government acted as Tantalus for the independents.

The Government recognized the importance of the independents, but they regarded their role as being complementary to, rather than competitive with, the corporations. The independents must be prepared to pioneer and the Government would then back them to the hilt.

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