

Letters

Briefing MPs

From Sir Archibald Hope

SIR,—The question of a specialist Parliamentary committee on aviation was referred to by at least two MPs in the Commons aviation debate on November 24. It is an aim which has been exercising the attention of the Air League, which to some extent set the ball rolling with the Parliamentary briefings it arranged on the F-111 and Spey-Mirage.

Referring to the impossibility of MPs going into technical discussions on the floor of the House, Mr Stephen Hastings said that Members "need access to papers and, above all, constant reference to technical advice. Therefore, we must have standing specialist committees, not in two years' time—not next year, but now . . ." Mr Eric Lubbock said that aviation-minded Members "have not managed to create in the House that interest in aviation matters which the subject deserves and which it would receive in a specialist committee." He added that there "is no substitute for the continuous study of the complex problems of research, development and production in the aircraft industry, with the benefit of expert advice, which we can give only by means of a select committee."

Mr Lubbock's remarks were quoted by you on December 1, and the editorial in your previous issue had concluded: "The highest decision-makers in the land—Civil Servants, serving officers (why not?) and members of the industry—should be regularly, personally and publicly answerable to expert all-party committees of Parliament. When that day comes British aviation will start moving ahead again."

The impetus for the formation of such committees must come from within Parliament itself, and we hope that it will soon do so. The Air League, as a non-commercial, non-party body, is convinced that MPs must have more accurate information on aviation matters and detailed industrial and technological advice on the problems which the industry faces. The proposed committee would, given the right terms of reference, provide the means of doing this.

London SW1

ARCHIBALD P. HOPE,
Chairman, the Air League

Duty-free Freighters

SIR,—Mr Ian Griffin refers to the question of the payment of import duty on the two Boeing 707-365C passenger/freighter aircraft ordered by British Eagle (Letters, December 22).

Before enlarging on the British Eagle case may I first be allowed to answer two points which he makes?

Mr Griffin implies that BOAC had received permission to waive duty only on its two 707-336C passenger freighters, whereas the corporation had been required to pay duty on the other 20 (now 19) 707-436 aircraft. Surely BOAC has not paid duty on any of its Boeing 707 fleet.

One further point worthy of mention—and one which Mr Griffin overlooks—is that the corporation is reputed to have paid an extra one million dollars for non-cargo fittings (galleys, toilets, passenger service units, etc) in each of the two 707-336Cs. One is left wondering why this extra expenditure was necessary if BOAC intends, and has given an undertaking, to use the aircraft only on all-freight services. We can ask ourselves if such expenditure is planned for the third freighter. It is our belief that the corporation plans to use the third freighter almost exclusively for passenger services.

However, arguments such as these are all very

academic in the light of the BOAC financial reconstruction and the Air Corporations Act 1966, which extinguished liabilities of £110 million including an accumulated deficit of £90.5 million.

The British Eagle case is built not only on the question of parity, but also on the undisputed fact that, unfortunately, there is no comparable British aircraft available. In the issue of *British Eagle News* to which Mr Griffin refers, Mr Bamberg went to great lengths to express his faith in, and support for, the British aircraft industry (British Eagle is the only one of Britain's big four airlines currently operating an all-British fleet), and went on to say, "it is essential that we have the most competitive piece of equipment obtainable. I believe that our commercial judgment in selecting the 707-365C is correct and that this is the most suitable aircraft for our needs in the long-haul field."

London W1

NIGEL THOMPSON,
British Eagle International Airlines

[See also our leading article this week—Ed.]

The Vanguard Accident Inquiry

SIR,—In your report of the Vanguard accident inquiry findings (page 1085, December 29), you state that "... the accident was caused by pilot error in a combination of factors and circumstances which are listed in the report as: low visibility . . . lack of experience of overshooting in fog . . . position error in pressure instruments, lacunae in training . . . and indifferent flap-selector design."

Disastrous air accidents require the most meticulous investigation, the results of which must be made public. It does not help understanding when under the heading of "pilot error" causes are listed which are not within the control of the pilot.

Undoubtedly the author of your article worked very closely from the official report, and this latter document was also guilty of producing a misleading summary which inferred that the blame should be placed squarely on the pilot's shoulders. "Pilot error" is a phrase that can be all too easily used, with irrevocable results. We feel that it is unfortunate that the commission which spent so long studying the accident should have been so careless in its presentation and phraseology.

Harlington, Middx

P. E. WARCUP, Air Cdre,
General Secretary,

British Air Line Pilots' Association

European Co-operation

SIR,—No doubt Joan Rieck ("European Co-operation," *Flight*, November 17) would agree with ACEA that Gp Capt Harrop's support would have been more welcome than his sympathy. He leaves us with no choice but to challenge several of the conclusions he reaches in his article "Co-operation with Europe—A Bed of Nettles?" (page 981, December 8).

The dominance of national interests is given as an obstacle to co-operation. But there are many common national interests among the countries of Europe that are sufficiently powerful to dictate a common aviation policy. These countries all need aeroplanes for both commerce and defence, and they would rather not have to spend dollars to obtain them. It is surely obvious that no European country would welcome an American monopoly of aircraft supply which would narrow its choice and undermine its bargaining position. But what are the alternatives to an American monopoly? There are two: (1) That these countries try independently to provide for their individual needs; and (2) that they recognise the advantages of mutual co-operation in aircraft design and production, viz, the larger market, with longer production runs and hence lower unit costs. The arguments in favour are familiar—perhaps even hackneyed—but none the less inescapable.

Continued on page 13