

## Parliament

KENNETH OWEN

Subject to an affirmative resolution of Parliament, the Ministry of Aviation should become part of the Ministry of Technology on or about February 15. The appropriate Transfer of Functions Order was tabled on January 17 when Parliament reassembled after the Christmas recess, and is expected to be debated in both Houses early next month.

Meanwhile, the Anglo-French variable-geometry aircraft cropped up at Westminster on three occasions last week. Lord Merrivale asked about it in the Lords on January 17, and the background to the Paris meeting was sketched by Lord Shackleton, now Minister Without Portfolio. Over the whole field of Anglo-French aircraft co-operation, he added, the intention was that there should be "more or less a balance of payments on either side." Obviously the situation would vary from year to year, but by and large it would work out level and both countries hoped to make a profit, in terms of foreign exchange, by their export earnings.

The next day the Secretary of State for Defence, Mr Healey, answered Com-

mons questions on the variable-geometry aircraft from Mr Goodhew, Mr Marten, Mr Wingfield Digby and Mr Wall. The great advantage of variable geometry, he told Mr Wall, was that it conferred great flexibility of role. The old idea that an aircraft could be built for a single role was now completely out of date.

Mr Robert Howarth (Labour, Bolton East) suggested that the absence of congratulations from the Opposition was rather significant. But Mr Healey was not in the mood to make party points. "I hope that both sides of the House will agree that this agreement lays the basis for the long-term future of the British and the French aircraft industries in co-operation with one another.

"I hope that, whatever disagreements we might have had about this matter in the past, we can now agree that the industry has a stable programme of military aircraft carrying it through the '70s and that both the industry and the Government have an equal responsibility from this stage on to see that nothing occurs which brings new instability to the programme."

The following day, January 19, the Prime Minister related the Anglo-French agreement to the possibility that Britain might join the European Economic Community. He agreed with Mr Jeremy Thorpe, the new Liberal leader, that the agreement augured well for Mr Wilson's talks with General de Gaulle. "Certainly the agreement with the French Government on what really means the integration of our aircraft industries for the

production of the main weapons of the Royal Air Force and French Air Force for the late 1970s is, I believe, a very important step, not only to what we are trying to achieve in Paris but as further proof of what I said in answer to the hon Member for Chelmsford."

This last reference was to a reply to Mr St John Stevas in which Mr Wilson had said: "Our loyal membership of NATO does not mean that we for our part think it right that vital sectors particularly of the technological industries of Europe should be overrun and dominated by American firms. . . ."

The products of two American firms, the Phantom and the F-111, had been raised in questions the previous day by Mr Frederick Burden (Conservative, Gillingham). In one written answer Mr Healey disclosed that "over three quarters of the Phantom requirements indicated by the Defence Review" had already been ordered, and further Phantom orders were not due to be placed until June.

The other question concerned the cost of the F-111. Mr Healey repeated that £2.1 million was the negotiated ceiling price before allowing for the addition of special British features; including these features the estimated unit cost would increase to about £2.5 million. "We hope to agree shortly to a supplemental ceiling price for these items," he added, "and I do not expect the overall price to be significantly different."

(Further points by Mr Healey and Lord Shackleton on the Anglo-French agreement, page 111).

## Effectiveness

ROBERT BLACKBURN

In my experience the British police are on the whole a tolerant, hard-working body. Many of their critics are heedless of the unsavoury routine tasks—dealing with accidents, for example—which are uncomplainingly and humanely handled by the police on the public's behalf. Relations between police and public are probably best in rural areas, where the local bobby is seen as a person rather than a blue symbol of authority. These men seem to me most unlike the laconic, unsmiling stereotypes of the TV serials. Our nearest policeman is known by his Christian name in the villages he covers. He has a young family, and his hobbies are photography and ornithology—interests which happen to be shared with my own household.

It was a neglected parking fine which brought Gordon to knock on our door, but the conversation soon turned to more agreeable topics. When the time came for him to leave I saw that his means of transport was a great upright bicycle. Good for the physique, it struck me, but hardly the most effective way of bringing

law to a large and fairly hilly stretch of countryside. Gordon agreed: his dearest ambition, he said, was to acquire a Minivan. Notice that he does not aspire to a powerful car with a flashing blue light but a plain Minivan—the cheapest available means of doing his job in reasonable speed and comfort.

The occasion came to mind last week when I read that, for the *n*th time, the police are being allowed to "experiment" with sinful modern helicopters. *The Guardian* reports that Mr Roy Jenkins ventured aloft in a helicopter over County Durham to watch a police exercise: "He said afterwards that helicopters might have great potential in police work, but they must be carefully looked at from the point of cost-effectiveness." Helicopters have been around for more than two decades and I should have thought it tolerably certain that they have great potential in police work. No one doubts that the Services need helicopters to fight wars, and it should have been obvious in Britain years ago that the police need helicopters to fight crime. As Mr Jenkins probably heard during his visit to America, helicopters are regularly used there in many civic roles. The reason is not because America is a bigger country, the helicopter being essentially a short-range craft anyway; nor is it entirely because America is

wealthier; the main reason is American willingness to absorb technology—to evaluate new tools in terms of an overall system and not in isolation. Britain is not the USA, and the last policy I would advocate is simply to copy the Americans. But it does make sense to examine their experience and profit from it where possible.

The helicopter is assumed to be expensive: so it must be "carefully looked at from the point of cost-effectiveness." But *is* it expensive? The answer is surely in terms of value, not cost. Having a police force is expensive; so is crime. The criterion of cost-effectiveness should be applied to the entire police system and not suspiciously reserved for new equipment and techniques. For instance, a new police station was built recently at Heathrow Airport by traditional methods in rather elegant dark grey bricks: would not industrialised building have produced perfectly adequate quarters in less time at lower cost without any adverse aesthetic effect on the locality? The police helicopter does not replace the police launch, patrol car, van or motor cycle. It supplements them, and in many cases it will put the police literally one jump ahead of the criminal, which for Mr Jenkins would be a fairly gratifying reversal of recent trends.