

A new decade . . .

reveal, namely that in this age of technology the amateur all-rounder must give place to the career specialist.

The supreme importance of an efficient Civil Service, and the endearing mythology that only Ministers matter, was manifest in the roll of senior ministers responsible for aviation in the sixties: Sandys, Thornycroft, Amery, Jenkins, Jay, Crosland, Rodgers, Mulley, Cousins, Benn, Stonehouse, Delacourt-Smith, and Mason. The higher the turnover in Ministers—and 13 in ten years is almost offensive—the greater the power of the Civil Service and the greater the need to check its power.

In this the sixties saw big advances, particularly in the public accountability of civil servants direct to specialist groups of MPs. This was healthy, making those responsible for spending public money directly answerable to those providing it (the Elstob Committee report got this point sadly wrong). Secrecy, so often the refuge of the inadequate or baffled civil servant, was in retreat if not yet routed. A better flow of information out of Whitehall was improving the quality of public debate and Parliamentary questioning. It is surprising to recollect that at the beginning of the decade a British airliner could crash fatally and nothing had to be published about it.

The year 1960 saw the great aircraft-industry mergers which, under Government pressure, resolved the British aircraft industry into two main groups. The resulting internal reorganisations distracted attention from the tasks at hand, and each group launched only one completely new aircraft project in the whole decade. But as 1970 opens both groups have their factories full, though not with many Anglo-European projects.

In 1960 the decree went forth that projects with a European content would be favoured, and that the proposed supersonic-airliner project should have a French partner. The Concorde was launched in the relatively cost-careless days of 1962. The estimate then was £160 million; today's estimate of £1,200 million is a reproach to the engineering profession as well as to the politicians. But the Concorde made a good—almost miraculous—start, and it is of course more than an aeroplane; it is an expression of faith in the ideal that Britain and France must work together.

Anglo-French collaboration was the theme of the decade, though it got only two aircraft and one missile (Concorde, Jaguar and Martel) flying, and it had become rather discordant as the decade ended. Indeed, the sixties went out in a flurry of Anglo-Americanism—Handley Page, Beechcraft Hawker, the news of a McDonnell Douglas licence to build the Harrier, and BAC Three-Eleven talks with, it is reported, Boeing.

France and Germany were dismayed and offended that the British Government, having abandoned the A-300B, should consider supporting the Three-

Eleven. But BAC is promising what the British Government asked the A-300 consortium to deliver, and which it failed to do, namely fixed Government financial liability and a firm starting orderbook including BEA.

There are other reasons for the rise of the Three-Eleven. Britain has the strongest and most original and complete aircraft industry outside the USA. It has not asserted this leadership and has made all the major concessions to collaboration. If it matters to France that Concorde, A-300B and Jaguar should spring first from French soil, then it does not matter to Britain. Such concessions are the price of Britain's belated Europeanism, and anyway it means work for British factories. But will Derby's river continue to flow if its source—airframe leadership—is transferred to Toulouse? There are fears that Britain's concessions are not being returned, and that her engines and equipment are not at the top of her partners' shopping lists. The sixties were of course the decade of President de Gaulle, and with his going may go much of the profitless chauvinism that has so frustrated European collaboration.

Air transport

The year 1960 saw the passing of the Civil Aviation Licensing Act. This made it possible for the independent airlines to compete on scheduled services with BOAC and BEA. The aim was that competition, carefully regulated by the Air Transport Licensing Board, should promote the growth and development of Britain's fastest-growing public-transport industry and hence the market for its aircraft industry. The most successful British airliner of the sixties, the One-Eleven, was sponsored by an independent. But the Act did not work well, and in 1967 the Edwards Committee was set up to examine afresh the rôle of the independents.

The 1960 Act failed because the Government declined to delegate its responsibility for BOAC and BEA to the Air Transport Licensing Board. The test case, which set the pattern for the ensuing decade, came in 1961 when the award of a licence to an independent to compete with BOAC on the North Atlantic was reversed by the Government on appeal. Nearly eight years later the Edwards Committee recommended in favour of such competition.

The White Paper which followed contemplates legislation in 1970 which seems likely to perpetuate and even to accentuate the basic problem—the existence of two licensing bodies, the Government and a Civil Aviation Authority. The new Act seems likely to give the owners of BOAC and BEA, the Board of Trade, power to enunciate overall policy, to veto awkward independent applications, to dispose of appeals, and to negotiate and approve international traffic rights and fares. This is hardly a charter for independents. It is a reversal rather than a progression of the thoughts, words and deeds of the fifties and sixties.

But there is time for wiser counsels to

prevail; and it is a matter of record that in its 1969 White Paper the Government accepted corporation-independent competition as having merit in principle. The other major principle established in the sixties was that BOAC and BEA would no longer be regarded as captive markets for the national aircraft industry. This caused temporary and, in the case of the VC10, avoidable damage. But in the seventies it will mean that aircraft will be built for world markets instead of being tailored too closely to the rather specialist needs of BOAC and BEA. The forthcoming civil aviation legislation anticipates a more common equipment policy for the two corporations in the seventies, and this also seems likely to result in aircraft of wider appeal. But BOAC and BEA will continue to be valued customers, with the Airbus and the Concorde as the prime candidates for orders on their merit.

While there is always something to improve, the aviation industry as a whole enters the seventies in better heart and above all more commercially than at any time in its history.

SENSOR

There is now no doubt that the production Concorde will achieve the 25,000lb-payload target by 1975 on Paris-New York in the worst conditions. On the most pessimistic possible assumptions about drag and weight from prototype development to date, payload is actually slightly below 25,000lb but not below taking into account a secret contingency weight-allowance which the companies are not admitting.

The Anglo-German-Italian deal on the Panavia 100/200 Multi-Role Combat Aircraft includes three opportunities for a partner to pull out without heavy financial penalties. One occurs before April 1 when prototype construction is due to be ordered, and the other two at critical stages in the three-year development programme.

A Boeing 747 in airline service will cost \$2.5 million to repair if it suffers similar damage to that incurred by the aircraft which undershot at Remon on December 13.

BAC are assuming that the A-300B will go ahead, and are not underestimating the seriousness of the French and German programme. They appreciate the political implications of building an aircraft in competition with industries which are partners (Concorde and Panavia 100/200) but believe from Vanguard and VC10 experience that there is no future for Europe in launching Government-aided civil aircraft for a captive home market.

TWA and Air Canada are the prime airlines wanting a go-ahead for the Lockheed TriStar Intercontinental with the new 55,000lb-thrust RB.211.