Incorporating "The Aeroplane"

A new year
In the first few weeks of this new year there will be a fresh oppor-tunity for Britain to produce a lasting aerospace policy. A com-mittee of officials under Sir Robert Marshall has been work-ing since last May, and its report should be with the responsible Minister, Mr John Davies, by the end of the month. He may be expected to present it to his Cabinet colleagues before Easter. Aerospace is technically and financially and hence politically the most difficult of industries. This is not an aviation vanity: it is a fact to which many financial fiascoes, cancellations and com-mittees attest. It is a fact which governments usually come to ap-preciate, but rather late in their
term.

At first, confronted by huge demands on the public purse, they maintain that aviation is no different from other industries— "no different from making bath-tubs," as Mr Benn once said. It must be put in its place. Minis-tries are shuffled, junior ministers put in charge. The problems do not go away. They get worse. Rolls-Royce goes broke. The pilot is changed, perhaps for a non-pilot. The cockpit layout is re-designed, a European heading is ordered.

The problems had arisen because the political throttles had not been controlled expertly and continuously. The machine was already on the back of the drag curve, where no amount of instant political power can reduce the rate of sink.
Sir Robert Marshall is a senior civil servant with responsibility for the whole of British industry. He is generally regarded in aero-

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space as one of its ablest admini-strators yet. Time will tell. What-ever else may be uncertain it is inescapable that the throttles, these days and henceforth, are in the hands of the civil servants. This is the first and most impor-tant point for the Marshall com-mittee.

In Victorian times the private capitalist provided the power for the industrial revolution which ever since has decided the wealth and strength of nations. The Civil Service role in those days was one of laissez-faire, or let rip. Tech-nology ripped, producing the engines, factories, looms, rail-ways and ships, and ultimately the aeroplanes, that have so changed the world. The old capi-talists had no need of civil servants.

Now the private capitalist is spent, at least as the main risk-taker in advanced technology. The stakes are too high, the returns—30 years for a super-sonic airliner?—too slow. There are bigger and quicker returns from consumer goods and bingo halls.

The civil servant, untrained in the uses of technical or commer-cial power, indeed trained to avoid the risks that successful aviation requires, is now the patron, buyer and physician of technology. The State is the new capitalist. The ghost of Marx haunts even America, the temple of private enterprise, where the State has explored space, financed SST and Qtol project work, and —in an astonishing doctrinal reversal—fias agreed to guaran-tee a conventional commercial aircraft risk.

The problems of British aero-

space will not be solved by grand new designs for European com-pany link-ups, airframe and guided-weapon mergers or other changes to the cockpit layout. The priority reform needed is in the quality of the command, in the training and experience of the new hands on the power levers. The physician must heal himself, prescribing greater expertise and continuity, and because power must always be trimmed, more public explanation by civil ser-vants to the consumers of their services. Sir Robert Marshall and his colleagues are, or should be, examining themselves.

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Front cover : Rolls-Royce Bristol Engine Division Pegasus 10 Mk 102 being installed in a Harrier at RAF Wittering. Progressive developments of this engine under investiga-tion for the US Navy include versions with plenum-chamber burning. Advances in pro-pulsion were never more significant than now, and our first special survey of the year, which begins on page 16a, describes the international turbine-engine scene