

## OUR PROGRESSIVE WAR OFFICE.

DISAPPOINTING is a mild term to apply to the terms of Colonel Seely's answer to the questions addressed to him by Mr. Arthur Lee on the subject of the War Office attitude towards aviation and the aeroplane. We had expected an important statement—one which should have conveyed the fact that even if the state of mind with which we are all too familiar had not undergone a complete reversal, would at least have led us to feel that the War Office had at last begun to show some sort of intelligent appreciation of what is required. But so far from that being the case, it is perfectly obvious that the Army Council, or that part of it which settles this particular detail of its policy, is still as stiff-necked as ever. Something it must do, for even an Army Council is amenable to public opinion in some slight degree, and if in this case it simply sat tight and declined altogether to touch the unclean thing—as the aeroplane is evidently thought to be—there would be too much said for the comfort and peace of mind of the distinguished officers who administer the details of our junior fighting service. However, on the principle of being thankful for small mercies, we may give a qualified welcome to the halting step forward which the Under-Secretary for War disclosed last week. But let us see how far this step carries us. To begin with, the question of offering a prize or prizes for aeroplanes suitable for military purposes is receiving "careful consideration"; but there are difficulties to be overcome, and, said the gallant Under-Secretary, "I am not yet in a position to make a statement on this point." It would be interesting to know just what these difficulties are. Do they consist in the ostrich-like refusal of some of the notoriously anti-progressive members of the Army Council to read the signs of the times? Or are they connected in any way with the parsimony of a Government which begrudges a few paltry thousands for the putting of our defensive Services in a state of at least as great efficiency as those of the Continent, but which is willing and eager to vote salaries to its supporters in the House of Commons? We give it up. But whatever the difficulties which hedge about the offer of a prize such as that which Mr. Arthur Lee had in mind, they do not appear to be insuperable on the other side of the Channel, for it is months since the French Minister of War announced a comprehensive prize scheme by means of which it was hoped to assist in the evolution of the ideal machine for military use. Because we thus put the prize scheme, which our own Government has "under consideration," first in the list, we do not desire it to be thought that we altogether blame our authorities for not taking this rather obvious course for the encouragement of inventors and constructors. Admittedly the prize scheme is a good one, but it is not the only way in which the desired end can be achieved. There are half a dozen other courses open to the authorities if they are sincerely wishful to keep abreast of the times, and, what is far more important, to make quite certain that a sudden emergency shall not find us unprepared. It is only that in this long drawn out "consideration" of things we discern the hand of the fossilised obstructionist, that we deplore the facts as they are. If only the Government showed that it had an alternative in its mind things would not be so bad, but so far as concerns any real desire to follow things up, we can only regard the official attitude as *non-possumus*.

Next we come to the vital question of the training of officers and men in the art of flying. Col. Seely tells

an expectant House that the Army Council has been carefully considering the number of trained observers necessary for our present war requirements, and has come to the conclusion that eighty to a hundred officers who are also pilots are required. Not being military experts we are content to take the figures of those who are, but it does seem to strike us that the numbers do not err on the side of generosity. Having settled on the numbers necessary, it manifestly becomes a question of securing proper training and practice for the selected officers. The statement that the Army Council is in negotiation with civilian schools is welcome, in that it indicates that the Council is fully alive to the advantages to be gained from having practically at its disposal the collective knowledge of the best of our flying men. No doubt in the end a military school of flying will be established, but even then we should regard it as unwise if the authorities neglected to maintain their advantage of the close touch with progress which association with the civilian schools must give. But the addendum which is tacked on to the Under-Secretary's statement regarding this matter of training is not quite such pleasant reading.

Certainly no one would anticipate that officers who are willing to qualify for what will unquestionably be the most hazardous service when next we find ourselves at war, would have to finance the whole or part of their training. But, unless we read Colonel Seely wrongly, this is precisely what is to happen. "As our present arrangements do not admit of opportunities of training so large a number, the Army Council is in communication with the various civilian schools of aviation in regard to the training of selected officers, and the terms they would consider sufficient, and it is proposed to make a grant-in-aid of the expenses of such training."

Those are the words of the Under-Secretary, and to us they convey the meaning that the State will make a benevolent grant to aid officers in meeting the expenses of their training. The spectacle of the wealthiest Power in the world bargaining and haggling with those whose sole wish it is to make themselves more efficient in its service would be humorous were it not at once painful and pathetic. There is one point, and one only, which can be regarded as completely satisfactory in the announcement, and that is the scale of pay to be granted to qualified aviators. In addition to their regimental pay, they will be given "engineer pay," which in the case of a lieutenant is 4s., a captain 6s., and a major 9s. per day. In addition, it is proposed to give such further pay or allowance as will, in the opinion of the Army Council, make the total remuneration adequate. That is good, but even so it hardly supplies an argument in favour of making the qualified aviator pay either in whole or part for his training. Of course, it might be said that the extra pay might tempt officers who are utterly unsuited for the rôle of aviator to take the course of instruction unless some restriction were made, but that is easily arranged without mulcting them in a substantial sum for educational purposes, which it is really up to the State to pay, inasmuch as it is in the interest of the State that we should have these men, and what is necessary is worth paying for.

In conclusion, we cannot but express ourselves as deeply disappointed. We cannot see that the statement of policy carries us much farther forward, nor indeed does it hold out a great deal of promise for the future.