

general public, who will sooner or later force the Government to act—a promise of ten more squadrons is to be noted—the position would be intolerable.

On the second score, that of an adequate supply of modern machines, matters are, if possible, even worse. We have no fear of contradiction in stating that since the Armistice the number of machines—experimental or otherwise—of post-War type and design ordered does not reach 100. We would even go so far as to doubt if it exceeds half of that number. In the name of economy, the R.A.F. has had to be content with machines built during the War and “reconditioned,” or, at best, with designs got out during the War. The result is that we have practically no machines the performance, armament, and constructional details of which are not well-known to other powers—our late enemies included. There is another side to this absence of official encouragement: Not only are our pilots and gunners mounted on obsolete machines, but the aircraft industry, upon whose skill in designing we depend, has been allowed to dwindle until it is the merest skeleton. We would not for a moment, suggest that the aircraft industry should have been artificially maintained at its War-time strength, but we do most emphatically say that there is every prospect of our depleted industry becoming further attenuated by the closing down of some of our most important firms—if the half-promised reform is not immediately brought into effect.

The Remedy

If we had unlimited money to spend on armaments the remedy would be simple. But the country is not in a position to afford more than we are already spending. Nor, in our opinion, is that necessary. What is required is a re-allocation of votes. We are not among those who think that we should, even in its present form, abandon altogether the Navy for the Air. The day for such a drastic change is a considerable way off, although we should hesitate to say it will never come. But we do think that a full realisation of the change which aircraft has wrought in the position of these islands has not yet been really grasped by some of those in authority.

We would, therefore, again suggest that one remedy for the present highly unsatisfactory state of things lies ear-marking some of the Navy millions which are now being wastefully spent, and allocating them to the R.A.F. By so doing, we should be able to mount our pilots on machines worthy of their pluck and skill, and not on obsolete machines from the last war.

On the civilian side, upon which we must depend for reserves in machines and personnel, at any rate as far as bombing, troop-carrying and similar duties are concerned, it should not be necessary to ask for more taxpayers' money; it is only a matter, as has been hammered in, month in and month out, of sending *all* first-class mail by air. The volume would be such as to bring within sight the day when civil aviation could “fly by itself.” This year, the P.M.G. announced a surplus of something like half a million, and he already looks like having twenty times that amount in his next year. Why not devote the half million bagatelle to defraying the small extra charge that might be required to send all first-class mail by air? The public would thus not be asked to pay more, would get the benefit of rapid transit (for with sensible organisation, air mail *can* save time, the experience with the London-Paris line not-

withstanding), and would be helping to build up a reserve which might well at some future date mean the difference between safety and defeat. To derive full benefit from such a scheme it would be necessary to attack the problems Imperially, making full use of airships, seaplanes and aeroplanes. At present, we have specialised on the aeroplane at the expense of the other two types of aircraft.

A very great deal of propaganda work is necessary to convince the public that flying as passengers is safe. But when a man has been sending—compulsorily at first if necessary—his letters by air for a year or two at a greatly accelerated speed, it is fairly safe to assume that sooner or later he will decide to follow his letters into the air when making calls in person. Popularising passenger flying has been attempted, and has not proved a superlative success. Why not give the mails a real chance, and make passengers a secondary consideration?

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The Need for Making Air Mails Compulsory

Against the carrying of mails by air on a large scale, it has been argued that the experience of the air mail on the London-Paris service has not been such as to encourage further expansion. While, on the face of it, this argument may appear sound, a brief consideration will show that the London-Paris route does not give a fair test. To begin with, the distance between the two cities—about 250 miles—is too short to allow full benefit to be derived from the higher speed of aircraft; the losses in time at the terminals form too great a percentage of the whole. If the routes were two or three times as long, the saving in time would then be very appreciable indeed. An excellent example of this is provided by the Cairo-Baghdad air mail, at present operated by the R.A.F., which might at some early period be handed over to private enterprise. As recorded the other day, a recent mail despatched from London reached Baghdad in eight days, as against the 29 days of the ordinary route. If such saving can be effected by the use of the air mail over a part only of the distance, what vistas it opens out in the elimination of space when mails are air-borne all the way.

The reasons for the present scant utilisation of the air mail between London and Paris are, as already mentioned, mainly the unsuitability of the route, and perhaps to an even greater extent the fact that, the mails forming such a negligible portion, instead of the bulk, of the load, machines have been kept waiting for passengers, when they ought to have been hasting across with the mails.

By making the sending of first-class mails by air compulsory, firms would be sure of a reasonably regular load, while the fact that no passengers were carried would often influence the pilots in the direction of fewer cancelled flights. When a pilot has the responsibility of a dozen lives, he might, quite rightly, hesitate to start under any severe weather conditions, whereas if he has only himself to think of, he will rarely refuse to fly. Thus strict regularity should be ensured. Our slogan should therefore now be: “Into the air with all first-class mails.”

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The Aerial Derby.

It has been decided, after all, to make Waddon the starting point for this year's Aerial Derby, on August 7.