

CIVIL AVIATION IN PARLIAMENT

SOME interesting points were raised in the House of Commons on July 30 during the discussion on the Vote of £415,000 for civil aviation. Capt. Guest, who opened the discussion, said while the attitude of the Air Ministry was now decidedly friendly towards civil aviation, there was still little to show in results, and other countries were doing far more. He held that the development of civil aviation was essential for defence, and the cheapest defence would be the stimulation, side by side with the military effort, of a large development of civil aviation as a potential reserve in war. Capt. Guest pointed out that the prospect of linking up North and South Africa by air with all its British Dependencies, was likely to be filched from us by another country, and referred to the activities of Belgium in the Congo, and to the proposed agreement, between that country and France, to link up the Mediterranean with Central Africa.

In the opinion of Mr. Garro-Jones, Great Britain had by no means secured her proper place in regard to civil aviation, and had to take the seventh place in the development of commercial aviation—even smaller countries like Holland being ahead of Great Britain.

That civil and military aviation should be kept separate was the opinion of Lieut.-Col. Moore-Brabazon. The question of war coming in connection with civil aviation, he thought, prevented many potential friends giving it the support which they would otherwise do.

Mr. L'Estrange Malone said that more money ought to be devoted to experimental work in aeronautics, and encouraging our aircraft constructors to try out new designs, while Mr. Hore-Belisha thought the reason why the development of civil aviation was so slow in this country was that, like broadcasting, it was in the hands of a monopoly.

A passenger and mail air service between Southampton, London, Liverpool, Glasgow and Belfast was suggested by Sir R. Lynn, and another suggestion, put forward by Rear-Admiral M. Sueter, was that the Secretary for Air should organise a big aviation exhibition, together with an Imperial Air Conference, in London next year.

Sir Henry Brittain asked the Secretary for Air to see that we were put in our right place on the map and in the air in the future—it was, he said, a farce that we should possess so few machines in comparison with France and Germany.

Sir S. Hoare, Secretary of State for Air, replying, said the Air Ministry had three aims which they were trying to achieve in the development of the civil side of aviation—one, to diffuse over the country a knowledge of air questions and a general interest in flying; another, to make the civil air lines economical and self-supporting; and thirdly, the development of Imperial air communications. Regarding the first, the country as a whole was much more keenly air minded now than it was four or five years ago, as was demonstrated in the development of light aeroplane clubs, which had done more to stimulate interest in air questions than anything else. They had created a demand for light aeroplanes, and several members had made distant and adventurous journeys to Australia and South Africa, whilst the number of civil pilots had greatly increased.

It was the Government's aim, he said, to make civil aviation economically self-supporting, and while civil aviation could be of great use in various ways, whether self-supporting or not, it was essential that sooner or later it must be free of Government subsidy.

During the last three years the actual tonnage carried by the Imperial Airways Company had risen by 66·3 per cent., and the load factor had risen from 60·23 per cent. to 66·27 per cent., whilst the insurance premium paid in respect to Imperial Airways machines had fallen from 20 per cent. to 10 per cent., even under the worst conditions. British civil aviation had been making quite definite progress during the last three years, and, so far from being criticised, was being held up as an object of admiration. We were on the high road to making civil aviation self-supporting.

As regards long distance Imperial air routes, he had been criticised for going slowly; he pointed out, however, that

they would have had the London-India route in actual operation months ago, but for difficulties that had arisen between one or two foreign countries. During the past 12 months he had given considerable and careful attention to the difficulty which had arisen with the Persian Government in connection with the right to fly over the Persian section of the route. He was in constant conversation with the Persian Government, and he saw no reason why the route should not be running to scheduled time next April, and was hopeful that an arrangement would be arrived at equally satisfactory to Persian and British interests. He had made a start with the India route, but once that was in full operation they would turn their attention principally to the Cape to Cairo route.

Already Sir Alan Cobham had been asked to present proposals, and he was also in touch with the Colonial Office and the Governments concerned on the route, and as soon as he had got the data he would see whether before the end of this Parliament they could not make a start with that great Imperial route.

On the question of subsidies, Sir Samuel said it was better to subsidise one company rather than a number of companies, and progress had been much quicker by that method than it would have been under the scheme of subsidising numerous small companies which existed before Imperial Airways came into being. He was, however, prepared to consider the best proposals from whatever source they came, but the best course in his view was for the various interests concerned to get together and put up a concerted proposal, and he would then see whether he could obtain the necessary subsidy.

Should, at any time in the future, the British taxpayer be called upon to pay a subsidy for an Imperial air route, then the Governments concerned along the route must take their full share and only call upon the British taxpayer to make up the deficiency—he hoped, a small one.

Referring to the airship programme, Sir Samuel said this was an integral part of the civil aviation problem. Should the airships prove successful they would have gone far to solve the long-distance non-stop Imperial air routes, and would avoid certain difficulties which had held them up on aeroplane routes. The airship programme was developing not unsatisfactorily, and the two airships (R.100 and R.101) would be ready for flight at very much the dates he had previously given to the House. As soon as they had done their home trials they would start trials to more distant places.

Regarding an air service in the West Indies, Sir Samuel said he would like to see one started, but the expenditure for such a service should fall mainly on the West Indian Government. He would also be glad to look into the suggestion of a flying-boat service between Southampton and Belfast, and should such a service be established, it was reasonable to expect some financial assistance from Belfast and the Government of Northern Ireland. If a proposal for this service were put forward, he would be prepared to lay it before Imperial Airways or other suitable organisation.

In his concluding remarks, before the Discussion was adjourned, Sir Samuel said, although he would have liked to have seen larger sums devoted to civil aviation during the last three or four years, we had not done so badly. We were now going to emerge on a period of definitely greater activity. We had the data on which we could base our plans for further progress. The agreement which he had recently signed with the Imperial Airways Company was based on the data of the experience of the last three or four years. The first of the main principles on which the agreement had been drawn up was a concentration on long-distance Imperial lines rather than short-distance European lines. A very important point in the new agreement was that the Air Ministry stipulated that the company should have an obsolescence clause under which its machines would become obsolete at a much quicker rate than heretofore. We had now got to the point where we could say clearly that, after possibly two or three more changes from the present types of machines, the machines would be covering expenses and civil aviation would be actually self-supporting.

Australian Aerial Services' Good Record

ON June 4 last the air mail and passenger service operated by Australian Aerial Services, Ltd. ("Lasco"), whose headquarters are situated at the Melbourne Aerodrome, completed its fourth year of operations. Inaugurated in June, 1924, the service was increased in July, 1925, by two "feeder" routes (one from Melbourne to Hay and one

from Broken Hill to Mildura), both time-tables interlocking with the through air line from Adelaide to Cootamundra. The company's fleet, comprising single-engined machines of post-war design, has now flown 600,692 miles with 9,287 passengers, without a fatality. This distance is equal to 24 flights around the world at the equator, or nearly three flights to the moon!