

second course had its attractions for a Cabinet which is very hard pressed for money. It is to the credit of Mr. MacDonald and his colleagues that they decided the question on higher considerations than that. The Prime Minister delivered himself of an epigram which, while in itself almost a truism, is often overlooked. He said: "In these days of financial stringency what can be saved must be saved, but sometimes saving is a form of very short-sighted extravagance." With these words he condemned the economy campaign of 1920 when airship activities were for the time closed down and all aeronautical progress in this country was brought to the verge of ruin.

Breaks in the continuity of progress are always harmful, especially in the case of aeronautics. We may take the example of high-speed work. France and the United States dropped out of competition for the Schneider Trophy, and both have found it very difficult to make up the leeway. Italy has kept at that work continuously since 1926, and, consequently has always been formidable. We only started scientifically on that work in 1927, and we have kept at it ever since; though it is only through the generosity of a private individual that Mr. Ramsay MacDonald has not this year been guilty, in his own words, of very short-sighted extravagance. British airship policy has suffered more than most forms of activity from lack of continuity. Sir John Simon said in the course of the debate: "I do not suppose that there has been any modern enterprise which has been so much interrupted, and so much the subject of chops and changes, as the airship policy." Major Church added that we had carried out a magnificent experiment with interruptions.

The best speech in the debate was made, as we should have expected it to be made, by Sir John Simon. He was very well advised, while supporting the proposals of the Cabinet, to mention in clear non-technical language the three great problems which airship experts have to face, namely, lift, power and speed, and unwieldiness in handling on the ground. The last of the three seems to us the most difficult, and we have no information as to whether the experiments at Cardington with the movable mooring mast are to proceed. We hope that they are. Sir John explained how increase of size improves the proportion of lift; while, of course, progress with the heavy-oil engine must in any case be pursued. Sir John gave as his reason, or one reason, for supporting the Government's plan the following consideration: "I think that we ought to regard airship transport and development as an international problem—not as an opportunity merely for developing a national service in rivalry with or at the expense of other people, but as an attempt by civilised mankind to do something more to make use of the brains and courage of men and of the character of the world in which we live. . . . But, if we want to do it, we must pay our way. We cannot expect America and Germany and other countries to afford us the full advantage of their progress and development if we do not do something ourselves."

Sir John Simon made one concrete proposal, namely, that one member of the Air Council should be a man whose principal qualification was very high scientific attainment in the branches of science

specially concerned with airships. The Air Council, naturally, is composed of aeroplane experts, and Sir John made a very telling remark when he said that though the atmosphere and the wind are the same for both classes of aircraft, so far as the cover, the gas-bags, the wires and the valves are concerned, "these are things in which a man skilled in the use of aeroplanes has no more reason to be considered an expert than anybody else." This fact is too often forgotten by the Press and the public when unreasonable attacks on airships are launched by writers in the Press who are only aeroplane experts. Still, we are not very much impressed by Sir John's proposal. Airships are still in an experimental stage, and while in that stage they are best left in the hands of those who devote themselves to a study of the subject. All those who can claim to be airship authorities are best employed in pushing on with the investigations. In the days when Sir Alliott Roe and Captain Geoffrey de Havilland were evolving their aeroplanes, it would not have been reasonable to take one of them and place him as a critical authority over the other. Mr. Montague explained that for airship purposes Cardington was the Air Ministry. Wing-Commander Colmore was the Director of Airship Development, head of an Air Ministry Directorate, and it would not have been practical politics to place another authority over him. It is a necessary condition of a novel experiment that the experimenter must for the time being remain the only authority on the subject. When airships have made good, as they still may do, then the idea of an airship Member of Council may well be revived.

One of the features of the Government's plan which most commends itself to us is that it ensures continuous practice for the crew of R100. Once, after bringing R100 to the tower in very difficult weather, Squadron-Leader Booth remarked: "No one in this country has had much airship experience for the last ten years." One of the weakest points of the late airship programme was that it allowed the older ships, R33 and R36, to be broken up so soon as the pressure-plotting flights had been completed. Some riggers were entirely new to airship work when they began to take their places in watches on the two new and very large ships. Booth's remark was an admission that even very skilled officers could get rusty after long periods aground, which is only to be expected. It is true that the crews very quickly learnt their duties, and on many occasions the officers showed great skill in manœuvring the ships up to the tower head, but it would have been better if they had all been in flying training. It is not quite fair to compare their efforts with the landing of the "Graf Zeppelin" at Cardington, for that was made in very perfect weather, but it is admitted that the constant practice of the German crews, and particularly the coxswains, has given them advantages which our men have not had. The crew of R100 has now been aground since last September, and that has not done them any good. Continuity in flying practice is almost as necessary as continuity in research. There must be further time expended on very careful re-conditioning of R100. When that has been completed, we hope to see her in the air once more.

