A very outspoken warning about the unpreparedness of the Royal Air Force, in both man-power and equipment, and the crisis which now threatens was given last week by Air Chief Marshal Sir Guy Garrod, G.B.E., K.C.B., D.S.C., A.F.C. He was speaking at a luncheon given at Londonderry House, on July 13th, by the Council of the Air League, of which he is chairman.

Four months ago, he said, the Council of the Air League of the United Kingdom launched a manifesto expressing grave anxiety about the state of our air defences. It was suggested in some quarters that we were alarmist, and even that we were irresponsible. But what was troubling us was the thought that, with the international situation as it was, there might at any time arise some international crisis, that would find this country with insufficient air defences. What we feared is exactly what has happened. In a grave and deteriorating international situation, our air defences are seriously deficient. Three months ago, with a full sense of responsibility, we described the state of our defences as alarming. To-day even that adjective is inadequate.

Making Service Attractive

We are convinced, from long experience, that there is only one way in which the manpower problem of the R.A.F. can be overcome, and that is by recruiting long-service volunteers. But there is another side of the question, and that is the making of the Air Service attractive both as regards pay and amenities. The pay at present is not good enough. How can you expect a skilled fitter to serve in the R.A.F. for considerably less emoluments than he is able to earn in civil life? I know it is argued that there are various amenities to take the place of money. We cannot afford to remain out of the competition of other industries, where their special skills decline.

Another source of great anxiety to us is the shortage of married quarters. There is a considerable housing programme under way, but it is moving too slowly. The Royal Air Force must be a mobile Air Force, and it cannot afford to remain in the Service. There is some extra-ordinary anomalies in this matter. For example, officers in the National Fire Service compensated for the income tax they pay on allowances, while officers in the fighting services are not. Another source of great anxiety is the shortage of married quarters.

The broad issue is that our air defences—the Royal Air Force, and almost as important, its Auxiliaries—must be strengthened, at any cost and without delay. It is well to remember that to-day Coastal Command, which was the heart of our air defences, dropped 70% of bombs in the first nine months of last year, and it was then that we were at our height of efficiency. It is well to remember that to-day aircraft, especially Coastal Command, are fighting nearer than ever before to the shores of the United Kingdom.

The Air League is therefore pressing for a definite statement from the Government that the R.A.F. will have an adequate number of squadrons armed with the most up-to-date long-range strategic bombers. We therefore welcomed the recent statement by Lord Alexander in the House of Lords that it is the intention that the R.A.F. shall remain a balanced force and will not be deprived of bombers. But this statement was not precise enough regarding long-range strategic bombers. And there is one other most important point. Are we to build modern four-engine bombers? It has been stated that "research and development" will take heavy priority, and that the advanced aircraft will be introduced piecemeal. But that is not enough. We must actually build these aircraft. And we will not wait to be told! We require this statement from the Government that the R.A.F. will have a balanced force and will not be deprived of bombers.

There remains the question of air transport. Of all the fighting services the R.A.F. needs transport aircraft most. It cannot accept the idea of an air arm, having great Imperial responsibilities, having to call upon surface transport on a scale such as it has never known before, to deal with an ever-diminishing supply from the number of other services which are tied entirely to surface transport moving at ten or fifteen miles an hour. Yet, again for lack of money and because of the shortage of manpower, it has been necessary to cut down Transport Command. To-day there are only 100 aircraft flying, and to-day orders for transport aircraft are being delayed because of their effects on the British aircraft industry. Bear in mind that a fighter or bomber squadron, can only fly itself overhead; there must be transport aircraft to keep them supplied with spare parts and workshop equipment. Then there are the demands for the Navy and the Army. Mobility is of the essence of modern war, and for a country which may have to meet aggression thousands of miles away, it is a vital necessity. We must be prepared to face the fact that the British charter companies and other private concerns, as an