Profit or Prestige?

NATIONAL "one-upmanship" policies of ordering bigger and faster airliners have frequently been the subject of comment in our pages. Flights no less than passengers are likely to be affected in one way or another, and here an airline captain adds his voice. While lamenting the trend, he admits that Britain cannot afford to stay out of the race.

"Can the huge new fleets of airliners now on order possibly attract enough passengers for them to be operated at a profit?" Throughout the world this is a question that is frequently being asked, yet something far more basic is really in dispute: "What is wanted from the airlines, profit or prestige?"

In the case of many privately controlled companies the answer is "profit." But most of the big companies are not private; they come under national control or influence. During the early years of aviation these main international carriers were not expected to make money. In one way or another they were helped by subsidy to fulfil their various duties. But after the war, which gave such impetus to airfield and aircraft construction, they were expected to make profits, and in general they have done so. Now, however, there are indications that airlines are being used as a means to an end. More and more they are expected to show the flag; to demonstrate national prestige; or even to act as weapons of political penetration.

The extent to which this is true is illustrated by the growth in the number of airlines, of which there are now about three hundred. It is difficult to think of a country without its own "national" airline. Almost every state, determined to keep up "national" prestige; or even to act as weapons of political penetration.

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Airlines as Political Instruments

By An Airline Captain

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