

THE DEFENCE DEBATE...

ordinary, said Mr Healey, to announce that we were to buy foreign aircraft a week before the Minister of Aviation was going to the United States to try to negotiate and bargain with the Americans for them to give some orders to the British aircraft industry. Surely, Mr Healey added, it would have been wise, having delayed so long, to delay a little longer and see whether these offers of contract could not have been used as a bargaining point.

The case for closer collaboration with the United States was made on other grounds by Mr Aubrey Jones. He traced with attractive clarity the four phases of British policy in deterrent power, from the attempt at an "almost wholly British" V-bomber-cum-Blue-Steel phase, through Skybolt and the Nassau Agreement to the phase of joint ownership and control of a mixed manned seaborne force. In each phase, said Mr Jones, there was an attenuation of this country's independence. He did not think it feasible to reverse this trend. The critical question was how long we could remain in the present phase. He continued, "If one has an alliance with more than one centre of nuclear decision, each looking with suspicion at what the other will do, I do not believe that the alliance will last. It will crack, as I believe the Western Alliance is now cracking." The needed single centre of nuclear decision could not now be a United States national centre; but an important step towards the desirable objective was the American proposal for a jointly owned, jointly controlled seaborne force, complemented by Mr Thorneycroft's proposal for a similarly controlled and owned tactical nuclear battlefield force.



Agusta-Bell 47G-3

Mr Grimond found himself in full agreement with Mr Aubrey Jones. He was not impressed by the independent deterrent as a card of entry to the top table. "The only conference it ever got us into," said Mr Grimond, "was the test ban conference at Moscow. It is a most extraordinary argument that one must keep nuclear weapons so that one can be present at conferences to ban them." He thought that the TSR.2 and our V-bombers might be offered to NATO as a new nuclear centre, which might become the sole centre.

Cdr Courtney said the choice of the American replacement for the Sea Vixen arose from the distorted policy of the 1957 White Paper, which belittled the role of the Navy and made it necessary to drop the Supermarine P.1177 [presumably the gallant commander had the Saunders-Roe SR.177 in mind], which would have produced a British replacement for the Sea Vixen. With Service integration in view, he thought that airmen should take more

account of the facts of political geography, of which the decision by Libya to abrogate her treaties with Britain and the United States was the latest example. His view was that the deployment of air power throughout the world will become increasingly impossible except from floating aerodromes—the aircraft carriers.

Mr Wigg wanted to know more about the helicopter considerations. He complained that the Hughes possibility had been dismissed in a few phrases although its evaluation had been completed at Boscombe Down only the previous Saturday. Mr George Brown, speaking in the second day's debate, said there was real anxiety about the way the helicopter replacement business had been handled. He accepted that the life of the V-bombers could possibly be extended by re-equipping them for low flying. Mr McNamara had said that the B-52 could be equipped for low-level operation—but at a cost of £1m apiece. Was this feasible for us, with our more limited resources, asked Mr Brown. Moreover, apart from the argument about aerodynamics [raised the previous day by Mr Healey on the basis of *Flight International's* comments], Mr Brown wanted to know what would happen to the black boxes when subjected to low-level buffeting.

The Secretary of State for Air restated the Government's belief in the V-bombers; they now had the ability to launch Blue Steel from high and low altitudes; the lone low-level bomber presented enormous problems to the defence; no missile system has yet been developed as an effective counter; even when the technical problems of knocking down such an aircraft had been overcome, such a missile system for low and high level to cover the vast area of Russia would be a fantastically expensive business. As for the expert criticism in *Flight International*, Mr Fraser said it was a pity that Mr Healey chose to read from one issue only: "In the next edition there was a fairly considerable change of tone." The Secretary of State was confident that the V-bomber force could be used for training and operation at low level until 1970 and beyond. The necessary modifications required for this low-level role were quite minor. As for the much-mentioned "gap," Mr Fraser claimed that "it is clear from research that we have done in Bomber Command that there will be no gap whatsoever between the credibility of Bomber Command and the coming of Polaris."

The rest of the debate provided a good deal of material for those who will want to argue defence policy as an election issue. The Secretary of State for Air characterized the Opposition policy as one of graduated unilateralism. The Minister of Defence, at his aggressive best, said he quite accepted the Opposition's desire to defend the country—but with what? On the other hand, Mr Brown said that the Opposition were being asked what they proposed to do with things five or ten years hence, while the Government were unwilling to say what would be coming this year.

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As a democratic pre-election exercise the two-day debate was a lively success. But few Members of Parliament (let alone the general public) could have picked up much fresh information about the equipment for which in a few weeks' time they will be asked to vote the necessary money. Whatever Minister presents next year's Statement on Defence, he may do well to recall Mr Healey's description of Mr McNamara's document to Congress: "170-odd pages of closely reasoned argument relating every item of expenditure to the role to which it relates . . . a detailed account of the cost of every project . . ." On the basis of similarly informative Statements, a defence debate could be even more useful!

MAURICE FARMAN

ONE BY ONE the tenuous links with the earliest days of heavier-than-air flight are being severed. On Tuesday of last week, February 25, Maurice Farman died in Paris at the age of 86, five years after the death of his even more famous brother Henri.

Though English by birth—they were the sons of a British newspaper correspondent—the two brothers had lived most of their lives in France. Cycle manufacturers by occupation, both were successful as racing cyclists and as competitors in the eventful motor car races held on the Continent in the early years of the century. In 1907 they found themselves drawn to the new adventure of flying, and Henri was the first to attract attention, in 1909, by a remarkable succession of record duration flights on a Voisin biplane he had modified himself. In that year Maurice also built a machine based on the Voisin. This, too, was extremely successful;

progressively developed over a period of three years, it was produced in relatively large numbers as the "Shorthorn," to be followed in 1914 by the "Longhorn." These two classic pusher biplanes were extensively used for military flying training, both in France and in this country, during the early stages of the 1914-18 war; they are still remembered with affection, or at any rate with mixed feelings, by old-timers who learned how to fly 50 years ago.

As early as 1911 Maurice Farman had experimented with some success in the use of wireless telegraphy and telephony in aeroplanes.

Though working independently on their designs the two brothers collaborated in manufacture, and the aircraft business they founded was to become one of the foremost in France. They retired from it when the French industry was nationalized in 1937.