

Parliament

ROBERT HOWARTH, MP*

Last month's announcement that the Government is to purchase Beagle Aircraft—at £1 million a relatively inexpensive subvention—has dispersed one of the clouds which were hanging persistently over the industry. I have a tender spot for these Shoreham-based Davids who are producing as fine a twin as is available anywhere.

Several months ago, when I first flew in the B.206S, I remember how impressed I was by its power and performance—yet smooth enough for normal conversation in its roomy cabin. If the Pup in its own class can match this excellence, and if the proposed agreement with Sud materialises, our joint challenge to United States hegemony could be very real indeed.

At the other end of the scale, the Labour Aviation Group's recent visit to Rolls-Royce at Derby followed hard on

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the announcement of record export performance and forward orders. I have known many Rolls-Royce engineers over the years, but had never before visited this Mecca of aero-engine skill. I was not disappointed.

Brief impressions may not be the most objective, but one detected an aura of confidence and ability at Derby which unfortunately contrasted sharply with the frustration and pessimism evident in certain other sections of the industry. Our management hosts reminded me in many ways of the forceful characters I have met at the head of some of the great American corporations. The facilities and general layout are breathtaking, and I trust that the new patron of aviation, the Minister of Technology, will himself make a similar pilgrimage soon.

I mention this particularly because, in my opinion, one of the few valid arguments in favour of killing-off the Ministry of Aviation is the claim that to bring the aerospace industries more closely within the general industrial picture will improve and speed up technological fallout. From what we saw at Derby there must be a host of ideas, materials and processes just waiting for application in other fields. I hope the energetic Mr Benn will grasp his new opportunity and exploit it to the full.

While on the subject of aero-engines, I have been concerned for some time at the obvious danger of Britain missing-out in the large subsonic field—in engines as well as airframes. Even if we thought that, independently, we could not build

a competitor to the Boeing 747, I would hope that we could decide very soon that we must have engines in the 40,000-50,000lb thrust class available for the early 1970s. Whether or not we build a European airbus—and heaven help us if we do not—operators must be given a choice between the JT9 and a version of the RB.178.

Time and again since entering Parliament I have been struck by the lack of appreciation by leading national figures, especially politicians, of the growth rate of air transport. Unfortunately it has not been only financial stringency which, for two decades, has restricted so many promising designs and allowed brilliant British ideas to wilt, it is the general failure to understand how different the picture will be in just five years' time—and quite unrecognisably so in ten years' time. From this stem so many basic errors in national policy.

This is why I share the enthusiasm for the Select Committee on Science and Technology expressed in this column last week by Eric Lubbock, the Liberal spokesman on aviation. If it is possible to hive off an aerospace sub-committee I am confident that there are sufficient MPs of all parties able to prove the value of a new instrument which should help to offset Parliament's obvious deficiencies in a technological era. It might bring a much-needed bipartisan aviation enthusiasm to the centre of political power which could eventually, with our European partners, re-establish a leading role for Britain.

Candour

ROBERT BLACKBURN

Of the various magazines produced solely for aircrew, the best I have ever seen is a relative newcomer—*Horizon*. It is published quarterly by BOAC Flight Operations and is just moving into its second year. In wishing it well, I also commend *Horizon* to the attention of anyone lucky enough to procure a copy.

The first function of such a journal must be to communicate information and to provoke intelligent discussion on matters relevant to good airmanship. *Horizon* is full of technical interest, with articles and notes on such subjects as inertial navigation, Doppler and gear-down ferrying. There are plenty of illustrations, the language is clear and the approach is refreshingly "plainman." The shop talk is thus quite intelligible even to the reader who, like myself, is neither a member of BOAC Flight Operations nor a professional pilot or engineer.

Technicalities, however, are the pill—the justification for producing such a magazine at all. It is the quality of the coating, savoury rather than sugar, which makes *Horizon* so noteworthy. The comments, correspondence and

cartoons are not subject to managerial or committee approval: the editor-cartoonist (Mr Oscar Ingham, a VC10 flight engineer) is obviously allowed to get on with the job, and he does it well.

A sample editorial comment from the September-October issue bade farewell to Cunard: "Nothing in recent weeks has been more profoundly impressive than the manner in which everyone in BOAC stifled their deep grief when our erstwhile "partner" pulled slowly away from the landing-stage and slid lugubriously over the horizon. . . ." A cartoon in the same issue shows two pilots discussing the parting: "I suppose it simply means they've finished helping us drag 'em out of the old fertiliser."

Last August *BOAC Review* printed a picture of a Hermes with a nostalgically rose-coloured caption which said the aircraft had "built up a reputation with passengers for its extreme comfort and had a strong appeal to travellers. It did much in helping to enhance BOAC's prestige and set a high standard for smooth air travel." Having mentioned that the Hermes entered service in August 1950, the caption added, a little unwisely perhaps, that it was "finally withdrawn" in December 1954. This provoked *Horizon* into "asking a few of the blokes who actually flew the things what they thought of them." The outcome: "Most of the answers can't

be reproduced here because they were generously interlarded with oaths and obscenities, especially from flight engineers, but as a rough synthesis it emerged that the Hermes was the biggest Heap that anyone ever flew, that it built up an unenviable reputation among passengers for monstrous irregularity and non-appearance, and that it did more damage in its ludicrously short operational life to BOAC's reputation than all the other aeroplanes we ever owned put together."

Perhaps it would be fair to mention in passing that notwithstanding the crews' opinions there were undoubtedly passengers who found the Hermes relatively comfortable. It was certainly quieter, for instance, than the more reliable Argonaut. However, I do not regard this particular issue as of any current importance; nor do I seek to imply by selective quotation that *Horizon* is anarchically at odds with BOAC management on all issues, or habitually given to knocking British aeroplanes. The comment on the Hermes can be interpreted as a straight plea from flying men for straight talk. All credit to BOAC for letting them have their say. But the humour and candour found in *Horizon's* pages are qualities too scarce, and too valuable, to be confined to the pages of flying magazines. Let us hope the fashion spreads in 1967.