

## WORLD NEWS . . .

transport system or even an alternative can be brought into being.

The symposium will focus attention on the urgent need to formulate and implement a national transport policy to cater for the great increase in the total number of people who will use all forms of transport within the next decade. An impressive line-up of speakers, including architects, politicians, economists and road and rail experts, as well as aviation authorities, will put their points of view. All interested will be welcome.

### The Pilots' Dispute

Prof J. Wood, of Sheffield University, has been appointed, by the Department of Employment and Productivity, as independent chairman to assist in discussions between the BOAC pilots and their management. (Background: page 7.)

### US Cancellation Charges

Sir Ian Orr-Ewing (Con; Hendon, N) asked in the Commons on June 17 when the Government expected to announce cancellation charges for F-111s, Chinooks

and Buccaneers, and when told that discussions on these "inevitably take time," commented: "Is it not time that the Government had some sense of urgency, since that single cancellation [of F-111s] may well cost as much as £55 million?"

Mr Gerry Fowler, Joint Parliamentary Secretary, Mintech, said that the US authorities were "currently assessing how much of our cancelled programme can be utilised in the manufacture of F-111s to meet their needs. It is clearly in our best interests that they should be given adequate time to undertake this complex assessment."

### King Air Icing Restriction

Pending the results of another deep probe into the icing characteristics of the PT6 engines in the Beechcraft King Air (a B90 recently made a forced landing following flame-out of both engines, and there have been six other instances of power interruption in icing conditions during the last year) the manufacturers and the FAA have recommended an operating restriction. It is suggested that flight above 15,000ft should not be made in conditions of visible moisture when the air temperature is between certain limits. These limits vary from +5°C and

-25°C at 18,000ft and between +5°C and -38°C at 24,000ft.

Earlier icing difficulties of the PT6 in the high-flying King Air (now the only pressurised aircraft powered by the PT6) resulted in a major change of the inertia-type ice and moisture particle deflector.

### Open Days: Date Corrections

As correctly announced on page 944 last week, Hawker Siddeley's open day at Hatfield is on Saturday, July 13, and not on July 6 as wrongly quoted in the events diary in the same issue.

In that diary, also, an open day at RAF Wittering on July 6 was announced. In fact no such event is planned.

### "Flight" Page Size

With this issue of *Flight*—the first of the July-December 1968 volume—a slight reduction has been made in page depth. The reason is that we shall shortly be employing a new printing process which, whilst giving improved reproduction, particularly of photographs, requires rather different page proportions. We are making the dimensional change now, so that readers who have their issues bound into half-yearly volumes will not be faced with copies of different sizes.

## Parliament

There could hardly have been a clearer illustration of the Government's pragmatic attitude—to use one of the Prime Minister's favourite adjectives—towards British aviation than in the Minister of Technology's reply to a Parliamentary question on June 24.

Mr Benn had been asked by Mr Neil Marten (Con; Banbury) if he would make a statement about progress with hypersonic flight, and his reply summed up echoes of past years when Britain had failed to pursue other aeronautical advances—like swept-wings, supersonic flight and variable geometry. "Expenditure by my Department on hypersonics research," the Minister said, almost with pride, "is being progressively reduced and is expected to fall to about £200,000 in 1969-70. This is all that can be justified at the present time."

Naturally this answer did not satisfy Mr Marten, who was immediately on his feet with a supplementary, asking: "Why, apart from the views given by the Plowden Committee, is this money being reduced, considering that this country leads the world in supersonic flight, and hypersonic flight is merely the next stage after supersonic flight? Will not the Minister reconsider the matter?"

He was hardly accurate in talking of Britain "leading the world" in supersonic

flight; perhaps, speaking off the cuff, he was thinking of supersonic airliners. But his motive was honest, and the answer he drew from Mr Benn was highly revealing of the Government's aviation philosophy, its lack of interest in any aircraft industry activity—whether hypersonic flight or space projects—which does not have an immediate market.

"I have considered [the matter] very carefully," the Minister said, "and I am sure that it is the right decision. Half our problems in the past have stemmed from our decision to remain in the most advanced fields and hope later to be able to sell equipment, instead of gearing our own effort to what the market really wants. I remind the hon gentleman that £200,000 a year on hypersonics research is still a substantial sum of money. I am sure that the right thing to do is to make room in our programme for the sort of research which will produce exports for this country in the relatively near future."

Revealing phrases indeed: "... decision to remain in the most advanced fields" (like TSR.2, which the Government cancelled, then ordered the F-111 to replace, then cancelled?); "... sort of research which will produce exports for this country in the relatively near future" (i.e., before the next General Election?).

Mr David Price (Con; Eastleigh) then suggested that there might be a role for Britain in the "no-man's-land between what we call aviation and what we call space . . . nothing like as expensive or as ambitious as the traditional space programme about which we usually talk." But Mr Benn was not to be budged and answered stolidly: "I am sure that the hon gentleman accepts that it makes

sense to shape our research and development to a large extent on the basis of investment put into industry for developments for which there is likely to be a market."

From hypothetical expenditure on hypersonic aircraft to very real expenditure in cancellation charges on very real F-111s takes only a few moments of Parliamentary time; and Mr Benn's Minister of State, Mr John Stonehouse, a few minutes later was telling MPs that Press reports about what the cancellation was going to cost Britain—like the one which appeared in *Flight* last week, quoting £108 million—had "no substance"; some of the estimates which had appeared were "quite excessive." He refused to be drawn by the request of Mr Patrick Wall (Con; Haltemprice) to comment on reports that cancellation costs were likely to be £62 million and that Britain would also lose the right to offset bids of £125 million. "Negotiations are continuing," said Mr Stonehouse; "it may be some months before I am in a position to make an announcement. . . . What we want to ensure is that we arrange the cancellation charges so as to put the least possible burden on the British Exchequer. . . . I do not want to add to my original reply that the reported figures are excessive. . . ."

Excessive or no, the F-111 affair is bound to prove a very expensive business for Britain. In the long run, it may well have proved more economical—especially from the R&D point of view—to have gone on with TSR.2. To have done so would have added immeasurably to Britain's comparatively meagre sum of supersonic knowledge, and have given her a stepping-stone to a now blighted hypersonic future.