

Letters

The Fallen Eagle

SIR,—I was appalled when viewing a recent edition of the BBC Television programme *24 Hours*.

Here were the employees of British Eagle, obviously stunned by their present position, having to suffer the incredibly bigoted and ill-conceived views of Mr Clive Jenkins, curiously enough the joint general secretary of the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs. The cause of this vituperous attack? Simply the earnest desire of a body of men and women to keep an independent airline flying!

So now we know. Whether it is the joint secretary of the ASTMS or a few sniggering, little-minded MPs in the House of Commons, there is a minority who rejoice in the cut-back or downfall of British Civil Aviation and in whom the word "independent" brings on an uncontrolled attack of hatred bordering on paranoia.

For heavens sake! Let us have in these positions men who understand aviation, and who have sufficient fire in their bellies to believe in, and want to promote and encourage, British civil aviation.

Haywards Heath, Sussex

DEREK L. SAUNDERS

SIR,—For many years I have voiced my opinion among my colleagues in aviation that independent operators of commercial airlines have always managed to continue in business under a Labour Government, though possibly not with the explosive growth that some boards of directors may have wished. We have had the get in, get rich and get out type of backer and, quite rightly, the governments of the day have been concerned about this type of operation. My reasons for understanding why a Labour Government was tolerant are twofold.

First, when a crisis developed abroad it was the independent airlines who were called in, their crews put into uniform and asked to fly into countries that exposed them to risks far outside their terms of reference as civil aircrew. I will quote the Middle East (on more than one occasion) and the terrible turmoil of Cyprus. While these operations were going on, BOAC were continuing their normal journeys to America and the Caribbean Islands, at great expense to British taxpayers—including, ironically, the crews involved in the civil-cum-military operations.

Secondly, we promoted the inclusive tours which allowed the ordinary people of this country to take advantage of what their European neighbours had enjoyed for many years—holidays in the sun. Not only did the nationalised airlines ignore the demand for such a service, they went so far as to decry it—that was until it became popular among the general public and profitable to the operators. Now BOAC and BEA not only want to participate, but they want the lot. How long

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will it take, once this happens, for the costs to rise above the purses of the people for whom it was intended?

I fear that the privately financed travel agencies will eventually be unable to offer competitively priced all-in holidays in conjunction with the not-so-very-self-supporting corporations. I believe that the first nail in the coffin of British Eagle was that while they were operating as Cunard Eagle in 1963 a licence issued to the company by the Licensing Board for a daily service on the North Atlantic was withdrawn out of hand by the Minister of Civil Aviation, Mr Peter Thorneycroft. So what price the Tories?

After the withdrawal of Cunard to BOAC in 1963, Mr Bamberg scraped together the remnants left to us by Cunard and accepted work on a purely break-even basis in order (in his own words) to keep together the most efficient group of people he knew until such time as we could rise once more to become a great airline. Faced then, as we are now, with a long period of unemployment, he brought a ray of hope. Above all, in the face of strong competition he succeeded. As the airline prospered, so did we. Conditions of service, pay, etc, have always been good. We were the only airline operating whose employees shared a "bonus on profits" scheme.

Why, then, should we not offer to help when a reversal occurs? To the 2,300 who worked for British Eagle it was not just somewhere to go in the hours from daylight to darkness. It was OUR AIRLINE.

Harlow, Essex

W. H. BREAKELL
(Senior flight engineer)

Those Airline Seats

SIR,—As a seat manufacturer, might I suggest that, if Leslie Bennett (Letters, October 31), wishes to travel in comfort he should buy himself a first-class ticket? Does he not realise that a modern high-density seat is designed to save both weight and space—not to save money on the furniture!

Airline economies are dictated by demand and cannot be brushed aside so casually. On holiday Mr Average has proved beyond all doubt that he requires to transport his family as cheaply and as quickly as possible—in that order. In this respect, the operator is forced to maximum utilisation of space and weight potential.

On scheduled services, I would invite Mr Bennett to observe how many passengers, if any, even bother to use the seat-recline facility.

The saying goes: "its all in the mind"—but "you pays your money and you takes your choice."

Stewkley, Bucks

GLYN LEWIS

SIR,—I thought it a bit biased and sneaky on the part of your correspondent, Wg Cdr Burbury (Letters, October 24), to quote only that part of the *Aviation Week* letter that suited his own viewpoint without also including the part that gave credit where due. The end paragraph read: "A few months ago I returned from London with a VC10 of BOAC. The flight was delightful. BOAC seems to spend less on marketing tools but more on the design of comfortable seats."

Carshalton, Surrey

J. R. FINNIMORE

Scope for BOAC?

SIR,—Many people have said recently that BOAC is not getting its share of world traffic. I can partially dispute this. According to the latest IATA figures, the corporation is seventh in tonne kilometres performed. It is 27th in passenger count and passenger load factor.

It is true that the corporation is suffering on the North Atlantic for lack of a European network of the same name. However, how many fifth-freedom carriers offer non-stop service to New York from Paris or Germany? Does BOAC offer non-stop or direct transatlantic services through third-party countries, like many Continental carriers?

There is a desperate need for BOAC to improve its services. Philadelphia, Washington, and Los Angeles