

## Civil aviation policy

For the first time since Sir Sefton Brancker in 1922, British civil aviation has a minister who knows about civil aviation. Mr Fred Corfield will be entrusted with all airline affairs by the new President of the Board of Trade, Mr Noble.

Ministers usually spend months getting to know their new subject, being briefed by those who have spent a lifetime in it, asking civil servants the wrong questions, and then being posted to another department just as they are getting run in. It is a system which, though good for politicians, does not make for much general progress.

Mr Corfield has been shadow aviation minister and chairman of the Conservative aviation committee for three years, and his lawyer's grasp of the complex minutiae has gained everyone's respect. We welcome him most warmly and hope that in power he will be able to put into effect some of the policies he has advocated in opposition.

His priority agenda will be BEA's Three-Eleven order; the future of BUA; and—closely bound in with this—the proposed new Civil Aviation Authority.

A BUA-Caledonian merger is now more likely than the BOAC take-over of BUA which was so nearly a *fait accompli* and which would almost certainly have followed a Labour victory. Mr Corfield may now expect BUA, whose merger with Caledonian into a Second Force was recommended by the Edwards Committee, to sue again for some BOAC and BEA territory.

No government could be expected to appropriate and transfer to the independents territory belonging to the corporations. In any case it has no legal power to do this. The Air Transport Licensing Board can re-

voke and transfer licences and a year ago BUA applied for BOAC's entire southern network. This not very tactful move inevitably forced the Labour Government to say "never."

Mr Corfield may well be able to withdraw the word "never," but he cannot be expected to do more. What he *can* say to BUA and Caledonian, and to anyone else interested in founder-membership of a Second Force, is perhaps something like this: "We intend to set up a route licensing authority with the power, authority and independence to ensure that decisions are made on purely economic and commercial grounds."

This, and a change in the appeal procedure, would be in line with Edwards, and it would ensure that the economic future of the independents was not for all practical purposes at the disposal of the owners of BOAC and BEA. This proposal would hardly be as readily convertible into profits as would, say, the gift of BOAC's African markets. But it would be a major concession.

All Mr Corfield's legal skills and those of the constitutional lawyers would be needed to make such delegation compatible with the Board of Trade's responsibilities for the State corporations. But a formula can be found.

The BOAC/BEA holdings board and the future of the ARB are not priority items. What is needed above all is a Civil Aviation (Licensing) Act 1970 which, to be specific, repeals those sections of the 1960 Act which withhold from the Air Transport Licensing Board responsibility for international fares and traffic rights, and which send appeals from its decisions to the owners of BOAC and BEA. The

law is bad; it leads to tiresome muddles, and it was singled out for reform by Edwards. The addition of a clause giving the new licensing authority powers to call for and to publish economic data, and the appointment of a younger board and a proper economic secretariat, would be major reforms, achieving progress with the minimum legislative and industrial disturbance.

The BAC Three-Eleven decision is simply a choice: is BEA to buy £500 millions' worth of American airbuses over the next 20 years, or is Britain to retain her hard-won and not insignificant share of the world's prodigious subsonic civil aviation market? This £150 million decision is helped by the fact that the airframe manufacturer concerned is the proven European leader in the field, is accepted in the US market, and is prepared to carry half the financial risk.

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Front cover: miles from the nearest habitation at its outdoor test centre at Peabees, Ohio, General Electric is able to create as much noise as it likes when testing engines such as the CF6 shown here on the cross-wind rig. But the CF6 is a social beast and quite quiet. See story beginning on page 15