Nationalisation—one step nearer

On January 15, British Secretary of State for Industry Mr Wedgwood Benn told the House of Commons which airframe and missile companies would be nationalised and presented the consultative paper reported opposite.

The main points of Mr Benn's statement were: "We propose to vest in a new Aircraft Corporation the shares of any company in Great Britain which carries on the business of developing or manufacturing complete aircraft or guided weapons (but not including helicopters) whose turnover, as shown in the accounts of its last financial year ending before October 29, 1974, together with that of its subsidiaries, exceeds £20 million.

As in the House, Mr Benn declined at his Press conference to explain how the "fair compensation" would be assessed, saying that this would have to await publication of the Bill. Asked whether BAC and HSA would at least be consulted about the consultation clause in the Bill, Mr Benn said that if the companies or the unions wanted to make representations on the basis of the Consultative Document (the document published last week) he would consider them.

Asked to explain his logic for leaving out Westland, Mr Benn replied: "After due consideration we thought it right to do it this way". Asked whether his decision had anything to do with the views of Westland workers about nationalisation, he replied: "We considered that the right basis on which to proceed was to use the aircraft and guided-weapon companies as the basis and that is why we brought proposals forward in this form".

Would Mr Benn expect the people in the industry to work better for an Aircraft Corporation of Great Britain headed by a professional industrial man or somebody else? Mr Benn replied that there was a desire and respect in the industry for good professional management, but this must be working for the industry.

Asked why he was "being careful not to be nice about the aircraft industry", Mr Benn said he was "very surprised" at the question: "We are bringing into the public sector the finest technical skills in Britain. I have made no criticism of management, not one. They have the most formidable problems to overcome and I have never criticised them. The framework in which they have worked has denied them the opportunity to give of their best. This is a remarkable industry and the people at every level in it really believe in it. I wish all British industry had the same spirit."

A new SBAC statement last week confirmed its "total" opposition to nationalisation. Valuation of the three companies will be difficult, because

Second Orly attack

Arab guerrillas made the second attack in a week on Paris Orly airport last Sunday (see also page 86). As close for press, reports of what happened are conflicting but it seems that a terrorist appeared on the terrace of Orly Sud as an El Al 747 was preparing for departure and fired a machine gun at the aircraft. The shots missed and the terrorist was spotted by police. Grenades were thrown amongst passengers in the lounge, shots were fired, and at least two guerrillas attempted to escape, taking hostages with them.

The terrorists sought shelter in the first-floor toilets. Negotiations with the Egyptian ambassador resulted in ten hostages being released and the Arabs being flown to Baghdad in an Air France 707 with a volunteer crew. It appears that the so-called Mohammed Boudia group was responsible and that the Palestinian Liberation Organisation has said that they will be put on trial and severely punished.

Shuttle's first week

British Airways' London-Glasgow shuttle carried 11,716 passengers in its first week of operations. Nine Trident Is made 195 flights, including 45 back-ups which each carried a minimum of seven passengers. Load factor was above 60 per cent.

The proportion of flights departing within 5min of scheduled time was 99 per cent, compared with a European Division average of 85 per cent.

Hawker Siddeley Aviation and Dynamics are both wholly owned subsidiaries and the shares of BAC are held equally between Vickers and General Electric and are not publicly quoted. The value of each of the concerns could lie between £75 million and £150 million. Of the funds reported by Mr Benn to have been invested in civil projects, very largely in Concorde and RB.211, very little has gone to Hawker Siddeley. If Government investment were a justification of ownership, then Hawker Siddeley more properly belongs to its main civil customers, China and the USA. BAC last year earned profits of nearly £14 million before tax.

Westland is to remain outside the Aircraft Corporation, partly because its aircraft are needed for the engineering make-up, but mainly because it neither needs nor absorbs such large sums of money in developing new projects. Shorts is already owned 69% by the British Government and a further 15% per cent by the Northern Irish Government's Harland and Wolff.

747 team recommends compulsion

The team investigating the crash of a Lufthansa 747 at Nairobi on November 20 has told the US Federal Aviation Administration that the leading-edge flaps should be added to the take-off alert system. (See page 86, this issue).

The recommendation forms part of an interim report by a team including members from Lufthansa, Boeing, Pratt & Whitney and the Kenyan Government. In a letter to the FAA, Mr D. C. Stewart, chief inspector of air accidents of the East African Community, said that "such a modification should be classed as mandatory [and] made available with a minimum of delay." He had heard of 12 minor incidents involving the warning system.

New Skytrain hearings

Laker Airways' proposed London-New York Skytrain will be the subject of public hearings by the British Civil Aviation Authority on January 21 and 22. The hearings follow a request from British Airways for Laker's present licence, issued in 1972 but not yet confirmed by the Americans, to be revoked.

A new light Sikorsky

S-76 is the designation of a new light helicopter announced by Sikorsky at the Helicopter Association of America convention at Anaheim, Cali-