

air

pictorial

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THIS MONTH'S COVER

The North American T2J two-seat jet trainer flew for the first time on Friday, 31st January, and it is destined to be the U.S. Navy's basic trainer. It has a span of 36 ft.; length 38 ft. 4 in.; height 14 ft. Maximum speed is 495 m.p.h.

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editorial

It is more than a year since the Minister of Defence presented his now historic White Paper, but there is no sign yet of the promised statement, through the Minister of Supply, of the Government's future policy regarding the Aircraft Industry. Meanwhile aircraft contracts have been drastically cut. The Treasury has apparently refused to sponsor the new B.E.A. and B.O.A.C. jetliner prototypes. There appears to be no sign as yet of the military aircraft specifications which were to have been forthcoming in the place of some of the cuts. Worst of all nothing in the nature of a long-term quantitative estimate of future missile and manned aircraft requirements—which the Air League believes to be of paramount importance—has been made.

In the face of this negative assault upon one of the largest and most important export industries in the country we cannot but think there has been a disappointingly inert resistance. Only within the past month or two has the SBAC pleaded for Government co-operation in aeronautical research before the standstill can occasion irrevocable harm and put the British Aircraft Industry as far behind in many fields as the cancellation in 1946 of the 1,000-m.p.h. Miles M.52 put the U.S.A. ahead of us in supersonic flight.

It is common knowledge that relatively few technicians, particularly those who are senior executives of the Aircraft Industry, share either the Minister of Defence's belief in the present perfection of guided missiles or his disbelief in the possibility of defending our country against a nuclear attack.

One only has to recall the number of errors met with in the simple electronic task of obtaining a telephone number in the new London automatic network, to discount the reliability of an infinitely more complex and much more highly-stressed system, which must yet achieve a far higher standard of precision. There is, too, the fact that man, imperfect and slow in reaction compared with an electronic pulse, is not only still by far the most adaptable computer, but he is also the smallest and lightest—and still the *only* one which can think.

Most British authorities agree with the U.S.A. view that the manned fighter will be needed for many years yet to bring missiles within striking distance of the enemy bomber, yet nobody has been courageous enough to stand up to the Government in its negative policy. We cannot avoid feeling that the Industry is somewhat in awe of the Minister of Defence, who is able thereby to break his sticks singly, whereas concerted action might well force the Government at least to think again.

During the recent attempt by the Minister of Supply to force B.E.A. to buy its new jet airliner from the group which he considered the more sound, Lord Douglas of Kirtleside stood firmly by the opinions of his executives—and won. In the opinion of the Air League it behoves the Aircraft Industry to seek its own salvation in a strong united front (but neither an amalgamation nor a consortium) presenting a vigorous, clear policy of its own against bureaucratic coercion. While it can well be argued that the Aircraft Industry has lived in a rose-tinted, cost-plus world for more than two decades, it is nevertheless true to say that a drastic withdrawal of Government support in almost all respects at the present time would deal it an irretrievable blow—for this withdrawal of support comes at a time of crucial technical development, the highest costs and the fiercest commercial competition from abroad.

Let but the Aircraft Industry present its case and it will find the country and the Press behind it almost to a man. While the present defence policy threatens the Industry's livelihood it threatens at the same time our lives.