

FOCUS ON AIRCRAFT PRODUCTION:

All eyes were turned upwards at Farnborough when at near-supersonic speed flew the Saunders-Roe 53 rocket-boosted fighter. Development of it, already planned at the Isle of Wight, works, was the SR.177. But Germany has now cancelled her order and Britain's defence provision has no place for the SR.177. The fine optimism that swept Cowes a few years ago (when the first Princess Flying Boat was put into the water) has given way to despondency. Now 1,000 workers at Saunders-Roe expect notice; 600 more fear that their turn will soon come. When the Princess displayed at Farnborough, its grace and power, there were no buyers. So £8m of government money (taxpayers' money) has gone down the drain, spent in bringing the Princess to perfection.

With the Swift fighter it was the same story of millions gone west. For though it once held the world speed record it fell a long way short of Service requirements.

But whitest of all government aeronautical white elephants was the gigantic Brabazon. By the time it took majestic wings, before the proud eyes of Lord Brabazon and Supply Minister George Strauss, £12m was spent. Of that 12-millions, six-and-a-half- were public money. But no airline would buy the Brab. Cheaper and more practical aircraft were on the way. But don't worry. You can always increase taxation.

Present Minister of Supply is Mr. Aubrey Jones. His presence a few months ago at the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Bedford, to inaugurate the huge wind-tunnel, underlined how closely Ministry and aircraft industry are linked. All the manufacturers will benefit by research here. Nor, in remembering the Ministry's losses on airplanes must be forget its gains. Outstanding just now is the Britannia. 77 are on order. And on all aircraft partly financed by the taxpayer the Ministry receives a percentage of the sales revenue. As for the Viscount, it makes a big contribution to the aircraft exports total of well over one hundred millions a year. The industry can undoubtedly deliver the goods, but for the taxpayers' sake can't those costly mistakes be prevented? We can't go on throwing money down the drain. That incomparable aircraft the Comet is back. From this point may we go on from strength to strength.