

Civil Aviation.

(Continued)

By NORMAN J HULBERT, A M I Ae E

The Air League What is wrong with the Air League of the British Empire? I ask this question quite seriously, because, obviously, when an organisation which exists for the encouragement of great ideals is seldom, if ever, heard of by the general public, then there must be something uncommonly wrong with its publicity department

The Air League was formed in 1909 with the object of encouraging aviation in every possible way, both from a military and civil point of view. Recently its activities under these heads seem to have become less and less, and now the only time I ever hear of it is in connection with a display of model aeroplanes at a schoolboy exhibition, or when they send one of their number to lecture to a Boy Scout camp. I fully appreciate that it is most necessary to encourage the youth of the country to take a serious interest in aviation, but I do suggest that an organisation with the title of "The Air League of the British Empire," should really do something else besides. For instance, they ought to organise public meetings throughout the country, urging the importance of air transport, then, again, funds permitting, they ought to get hold of two or three light aeroplanes (Moths, Avians or Bluebirds), and send them on a propaganda tour round England, and so arouse interest in aviation in the small towns and villages. However, quite apart from other considerations, they could probably raise quite a lot of money by giving joy rides, etc. in out-of-the-way places. I have heard a great deal recently about the activities of a Committee under the Chairmanship of Lord Burnham, who are enquiring into the affairs of the Air League, and there have also been rumours that a very distinguished officer was to be appointed as Organising Secretary, but up to the present nothing seems to have happened, and as this Committee started its work some months ago, this again shows that enterprise and the ability to get things done quickly are not virtues possessed by the present personnel of the Air League.

It is interesting to remember that the French Air League has a membership of over 1,000,000, and in Germany the great Luftfahrtverband has a membership considerably in excess of this, with branches in almost every town, while some of the newer countries—for instance, Czecho-Slovakia—have an Air League with a membership of about 100,000, yet the Air League of the British Empire cannot boast of more than about 6,000 members. This, I think, is the best possible evidence that the Air League of the British Empire really needs a thorough spring-clean, and I would suggest that in the interests of British aviation, the sooner they do it, the better.

By Light Aeroplane to Australia Mr Bert Hinkler, the well-known test pilot of Messrs A V Roe & Co Ltd, proposes to fly on a standard Avro Avian, with a passenger, from London to Australia in the near future. This is really a very ambitious flight, and if he succeeds, as we all hope he will, both he and the designers of the Avian and the Genet will certainly deserve the hearty congratulation of everyone. I also hear that Mr Hinkler proposes to remain in Australia for a considerable time as the representative of a well-known British aircraft firm. This is, I think, unfortunate, as to-day we can ill afford to lose the services of one of our most capable and brilliant pilots. However, I wish him the very best of luck in his new venture.

The Air Estimates The most astonishing fact, to my mind, is that less than three per cent of the total Air Ministry vote is allocated to Civil Aviation. This is even less than the cost of the administrative side of the Air Ministry, which is about £700,000.

It must surely be obvious to those who preside over the Air Ministry, that to have an efficient Air Force organisation on an economic basis it is absolutely essential that it should be supported by an efficient aircraft industry, and by a large and well-organised commercial air system. As in the past the mercantile marine has been the best possible reserve for the British Navy, so should we pursue an air policy which will maintain an efficient commercial air service, which is in itself a natural reserve, both as regards pilots and machines, to the Royal Air Force.

“The Great Delusion” This month the public have been privileged to read a book entitled “The Great Delusion,” by an author who, for obvious reasons, desires to remain anonymous, and who consequently calls himself “Neon,” which, as Lord Thomson pointed out in his criticism of the book is “an atmospheric gas recently discovered, with an already determined density.”

“The Great Delusion” aims at shattering all the hopes, ambitions and beliefs which people have in the future of aviation, both from a military and civil aspect. In regard to the former, it is rather outside the province of these notes to deal with it, except to say that the views of Lord Thomson and “Neon” as to whether a Blockade or Bombs are the most humane weapons of modern warfare, are certainly interesting, and, to many people, amusing.

As regards Civil Aviation, “Neon’s” strongest point is that aviation fails to show any progress. I would remind him (or her) that ten years ago it was not possible to fly between London and the Continent with the regularity and safety of other means of transport, neither was it possible for a single-engined aeroplane to fly from London to Australia and back, nor, again, had aircraft reached such a state of perfection that men and women who had possibly never seen an aeroplane before, have been able to join the various light aeroplane clubs and learn to fly in the course of a few hours.

I would also point out that ten years after the “Rocket” was constructed, express trains weighing possibly 500 tons did not do non-stop journeys from London to Plymouth. The analogy is obvious.

“ Neon ” deals very considerably with the operating cost of air lines, but if the figures he gives can be substantiated, one immediately asks this question why, then, is every country in the world rapidly increasing their air service, and why are fares still being reduced ? As an example of the latter, the Deutsche Luft Hansa have recently reduced the fare from London to Amsterdam, to £3, which is less than the cost of boat and rail fare

However, “ The Great Delusion ” is an extraordinary book, and we shall probably learn many lessons from it, although it is, I think, unfortunate that “ Neon ’ should conceal his identity, for by doing so the public are possibly inclined to believe that “ Neon ” is an even greater expert than he may possibly be
