

It's Planes they're Waiting for!

"We have got the men – It's planes they're waiting for" read the headline. The newspaper article was written in early 1942 as 'The Case against M.A.P.' by Colin Bednall. M.A.P. being the Ministry of Aircraft Production.

'If the R.A.F. is to hold its lead in the great new air offensive opened up in Western Europe,' the article began, 'It must have a mounting, unbroken supply of two things – MEN and PLANES. The men are assured, thanks to the spirit of British youth which, most surprisingly for our enemies, is no less ready for service and sacrifice than ever it was.

The great E.A.T.S. (Empire Air Training Scheme) has provided the means for fit and able young men to train as pilots, navigators, wireless operators, air gunners and flight engineers on a scale comparable with infantry schools in earlier wars.



As for planes, Great Britain with her enormous industrial resources is capable of turning out aeroplanes – even monster aeroplanes – in tremendous numbers. We have the world's greatest designers, plenty of money still, good workmen and – although they hate to admit it – the world's smartest businessmen. The combination should assure us our material wants or, in other words, "the tools to finish the job."

But somehow it hasn't quite worked out that way.

Official circles have given up trying to conceal the fact that while our factories are delivering quantities of planes the flow has fallen short of expectations.

In R.A.F. reception depots large numbers of airmen shipped across from the flying schools in Canada and elsewhere sit fretting *above*, because the planes they were trained for have not arrived.

Red Tape Won



There has been no question of production breaking down. It just hasn't been good enough. And it was to prevent a bottleneck of this kind that the Ministry of Aircraft Production was formed in May 1940. At the end of a year the Ministry had grown to an enormous size and red tape soon began to catch up with smart business methods. The greatest single item produced appeared to be Civil Servants.

Departmental procedure which fixed the status of principals according to the size of the staffs they commanded and not according to the importance of the jobs they did, encouraged the creation of over-wieldy and even redundant directorates.

Harassed aircraft manufacturers found it increasingly difficult to get decisions made. More and more of their time was taken up in filling in forms and supplying information over and over again to a stream of officials from the now almost countless branches of the M.A.P.

Precious few of M.A.P. personnel themselves had any knowledge of aircraft manufacture or factory production. Some were ex-Service men, many ex-salesmen, and others lawyers. I know of one experienced engineer whose immediate superior had been a wine merchant in peace-time.

The theory seems to have been that outside experience was the first and essential requirement.



Then on February 23rd of this year control of the Ministry of Aircraft Production passed to Colonel J. J. Llewellyn, who for years had enjoyed a slow but unbroken advancement in Government service. Soon after he took office information reached me suggesting that he had taken quick action to improve the supervision and output in aircraft production.

I called it "Crisis Methods" in the Daily Mail, and this was the start of an entirely fortuitous chain of events which have given me a remarkable insight into the workings and worth of M.A.P.

First of all, a number of puzzled manufacturers confirmed the need for "Crisis Methods," but declared they could see no sign of them. The manufacturers themselves suggested five crisis methods:

1. A pruning of the non-productive staff within M.A.P.
2. An end to the process of allowing the financial tail to wag the production dog.
3. A concentration of M.A.P. efforts on ensuring an even flow of raw materials and equipment to the factories.
4. The introduction of more experienced men at the head of the M.A.P.
5. A reduction in the number of modifications made to aircraft during the course of their production.

Checking Up

I received many letters from men with a working knowledge of M.A.P. Some were inspired by personal grudges, but it is food for thought in itself that there *are* so many people with grudges against this Ministry.

I took the trouble to meet some of my correspondents, and then I spent more than a month checking, as far as possible, the accuracy of what they had to say. There appears, I find, to be ample justification for the claim of an engineer of wide experience that the M.A.P. could dispense immediately with from 25 to 50 percent, of its present staff.

A former R.A.F. officer writing from Gloucester, described his personal experience of the constant struggle among the Ministry's principals to maintain the largest possible staffs and thereby assure high grading in accordance with Civil Service procedure. The officer says: "I have done nothing useful for months, but my department, where I am redundant, refuses to grant me a transfer to another post where my services are urgently required. The fact that I have been discharged by an R.A.F. medical

board and am therefore immune from further military service apparently enhances my value in the eyes of my departmental chief."

Butcher Boss

A man who held a responsible position in the Air Ministry during the last war and afterwards served two of Britain's leading aircraft manufacturing firms, says he left aircraft production in this war when a peace-time *butcher* was put in charge of his department. The butcher, it appears, had a relative higher up.

If an enquiry were made into the means by which senior officers of the Ministry secured their jobs, it would be found that an enormous number of them have been introduced by friends and relatives with too little regards to other qualifications.



In the past 12 months or so considerably more than 50 high-salaried men from one private contracting firm have joined a branch of M.A.P. concerned with supervising the construction of factories. During the winter of 1940-41, when the need for factories was most urgent, this branch consisted of a mere handful of qualified engineers and other experts. Today it is about ten times bigger, despite the fact that if factories are going to be of any use at all in this war they should at least have been built by now.

The newcomers have all come in at senior grades with all kinds of high sounding-titles. Therefore, it is not surprising that the establishment list of this one of many branches is ridiculously top-heavy and looks more like the roll of executives in a Hollywood film studio.

Roughly as follows in these numbers:

1 – Director General.

1 – Principal Director.

2 – Deputy Directors.

4 – Directors.

21 – Assistant Directors.

57 – Senior Production Officers.

106 – Production Officers.

2 Draughtsmen, 2 Tracers, 2 Technical Advisers, 1 Civil Engineer, 1 Assistant Surveyor.

A pruning of the tall poppies in branches similar to this one would greatly assist industry to get on with the job of making aeroplanes. It would also make the M.A.P. a more efficient and a happier place to work in than it is at the moment.

Some Good Work

I do not want to give the impression that the Ministry is entirely dead-weight. It has been responsible for much that deserves the nation's gratitude. Its businesslike handling, for instance, of component parts for the factories has resulted in a much more even distribution than would have otherwise been possible, and has contributed enormously to the production of planes.

Also, it would be an exaggeration to claim that the top-heavy nature of the Ministry's staff is entirely responsible for production lags. If every factory employee would work just three or four hours extra a week there would be a tremendous jump in output.

But M.A.P. should cease trying to impress us with occasional announcements of a "record week's production." If production had expanded as it should have expanded, *every* week or *every* month would be a record.'