

Howe must answer for Jetliner remarks

HOW LONG must this country endure the irresponsibility and arrogance of Trade Minister Howe? His most recent eruption, the wanton slander of a private company, was doubly repugnant because it was made from behind the safe bulwark of Parliamentary immunity.

Mr. Howe's flippant condemnation was aimed at A. V. Roe Canada Ltd. The Jetliner built by that company, he said, had "everything wrong with it. It had to carry sand in the tail to fly." That statement is diametrically opposite to the Jetliner's record, and company officials were quick to say so. Regrettably, the company cannot pursue the slander to its logical conclusion—the courts—not only because of Mr. Howe's immunity, but because it is dependent for its existence on Government orders.

Mr. Howe undoubtedly finds reminiscence of the Jetliner episode hurtful and he would like to forget it. His performance was a sorry contradiction of the claim of his sycophants and apologists about his great contribution to the building of Canada. Thanks to the Jetliner, this country was on the threshold of world leadership in the aircraft industry when that airliner made its maiden flight in 1949. Thanks to Mr. Howe, that leadership was never attained.

The Jetliner was the first commercial jet aircraft in North America. It was several years ahead of any North American competitors—indeed, no commercial jet is yet in service in the United States or Canada. Big orders were anticipated from major airline operators, including Trans-Canada Airlines.

The Jetliner—for which the Government paid 75 per cent of development costs—was given exhaustive tests and met

them all. It made a spectacular tour of U. S. cities and set records for speed, altitude and rate of climb. On many of its test flights, conditions of full passenger and baggage load were simulated, using ballast—quite probably, sand bags.

For reasons which have never been fully explained, TCA decided not to purchase the Jetliner. Just when U. S. companies were arranging to buy it, Mr. Howe announced that all Jetliner development was to be scrapped. Ostensibly, the reason was to permit Avro to concentrate on the defense priorities of the Korean War.

Avro never claimed the Jetliner was perfect. Certain improvements were to be incorporated in a second prototype, which was actually under construction. In 1953, two years after the project was shelved, Mr. Howe said the Jetliner had not been accepted for commercial service by the Department of Transport—neglecting to say whether it had flown the requisite number of hours to receive such sanction—but added that a production model of the aircraft would undoubtedly be given a certificate of airworthiness.

The tragedy is not merely that Canada missed a chance to become the leading producer of commercial jets in the world, when that chance was within its grasp; it is also that the opportunity was denied this country by a man so irresponsible that he now glibly belittles an outstanding company to save his own face.

No Minister is so omniscient or authoritarian as to make statements like this without challenge. Mr. Howe's attack on Avro warrants the fullest investigation by a judicial commission, staffed with competent counsel. If it is shown to be unfounded, an apology will not be enough; he should resign.

—Globe & Mail, July 3.