

Swan song for a new sweeper

New brooms sweep clean. But they sometimes sweep away things of value. The RCAF experienced this when the Conservatives replaced the Liberals in Ottawa, in 1957. The RAF suffered the same experience when Labour came to power in Britain last year.

There is a close similarity between the cancellation of the Avro Arrow and the recent killing of the British Aircraft Corp. TSR.2 by the new British government. In each case, development was far advanced and had cost plenty — in fact, about the same amount of between \$350 and \$400 million. In each case aircraft were flying and were available for their respective test programs. Both the Avro/Arrow and the TSR.2 had performed well in their initial flights, and looked very promising.

They were scrapped because it was thought that they would cost too much in the small quantities in which they were to be produced. In Canada, there was a further reason, which had some merit: There was no apparent urgent need for the Avro/Arrow. The essential part of its job, air surveillance, could be done (and is now being done) with a less complex aircraft, the CF-101.

There was no such justification for the cancellation of the TSR.2, a multi-purpose aircraft, intended primarily to be the successor to the V-bombers. It was smaller than the Vulcan or Victor, but much more advanced and much less vulnerable. It had the range and the load-carrying capacity to be an effective weapons system for nuclear deterrence in Europe.

This job still has to be done as long as Great Britain intends to maintain an independent deterrent, and despite some noises to that effect, the Labour government has made no real move toward giving it up. On the contrary, it is shopping around for a substitute for the TSR.2.

The only American aircraft which will do the job is the General Dynamics F-111, and it is not certain whether this will be able to take the whole TSR.2 electronics package. This kit, which was considered necessary to penetrate highly sophisticated defences, included Decca Doppler, terrain-following, and sideward-looking radar, analog and digital computers, and moving map displays.

What now is certain is that the F-111 will cost just about as much as the TSR.2 would have cost — over \$8 million apiece. This is revealed in a report from London which states the Air

Ministry is now thinking in terms of 60 F-111s at a total price of \$504 million. If these are bought — and the RAF certainly needs them (and indeed wanted 140, not 60, TSR.2s), then the British aircraft industry has been seriously damaged to no avail.

This report has jolted the economy-minded people who scrapped the TSR.2. They are now looking at the French Mirage IV, which with Rolls-Royce Spey engines and British electronics could perhaps be held down to a unit cost of just under \$5 million. But the air marshals who wanted the TSR.2 will settle for nothing less than the F-111, and if no solution is found to this conflict between the politicians and the service chiefs, the RAF may get no V-bomber replacement at all.

This is not the end of British military aircraft woes. The McDonnell Phantom F-4, which has been chosen as the tactical fighter for the RAF and the RN, is scheduled to be built in Britain under license, because it was thought that this would be cheaper than developing a British aircraft. But according to a recent statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, 300 McDonnell F-4Ks (for the RN) and F-4Ms (for the RAF), with Spey engines, British electronics, spares, support equipment, and the cost of one year's flying (incidentally, almost exactly the actuarial basis on which Canada bought the CF-5) will come to at least \$1.2 billion and perhaps as much as \$1.5 billion. Taking the median figure, the Phantoms will thus cost \$4.5 million each.

As far as is known, not one new British military aircraft is at present on the drawing board — only adaptations of types in use for some time, like a Spey-powered version of the Buccaneer strike aircraft, and the HS.801 maritime Comet (with Spey engines). The Kestrel VTOL fighter is continuing its seemingly unending test program — and is in the meantime being overtaken by foreign designs.

There is just one interesting Anglo-French project under way — for a tactical fighter in the CF-5 category. This is the Breguet-B.A.C. Jaguar, but it is derived from a French design (the Breguet Taon). So this is the extent of major development work in the British military aircraft industry, which once led the world, certainly qualitatively. Original research, production know-how, and thousands of jobs are being dissipated, along with the cash savings that were to have been made.