

should not be brought within a fortnight of the farthest cities and territories of the Empire. There is no technical reason why the journey to Canada should not be reduced to two and a half days, the journey to India five days, to Cape Town six days, to Australia eleven days, to New Zealand thirteen days. These claims I can, of course, support by detailed and expert evidence at the Imperial Air Communications Sub-Committee meeting this afternoon. This morning I do nothing more than state them for the purpose of illustrating to the Conference the power of the new instrument that is now within our reach.

Having, then, stated these propositions, let me suggest to the Conference certain ways in which we can make fuller use of this new instrument in the near future. If I speak mainly of British policy and British services it is not because I do not fully appreciate the remarkable progress that has been made with the air routes in Australia, or with air survey work in Canada. I deal chiefly with British routes and British policy because I am for the moment taking London as the terminus of the principal Empire air routes.

Hitherto, whilst certain European services have been safely and punctually operated for several years, there has been no civil air service plying between one part of the Empire and another. In the Middle East an air route between Egypt and Iraq has been regularly flown by military machines, carrying mails and official passengers, for five years. The route, 866 miles in length, has been methodically equipped with landing-grounds and refuelling-stations, and over it for five years have passed mails and official passengers in as many hours as it would have taken them days by pre-war transport. It was over this route that the Secretary of State for the Colonies and I made our journey to Iraq eighteen months ago, and it was by means of air transport that we were able to visit in the space of the short Parliamentary Easter recess almost every important point from Cairo to the Anglo-Persian oilfields.

An Empire Air Route to the Far East and Australia.

You will see in my memorandum that we now propose to substitute in place of this military service a regular civil line, for the carriage of freight and passengers, not only between Cairo and Baghdad but between Cairo and Karachi. My wife and I propose to make the opening journey on this route at the end of the year, and already time-tables have been issued and passages booked for the subsequent flights. The service will in itself be of great interest, for it will enable us to test the demand for the saving of seven or eight days in the journey between England and India. Since there is as yet no air route between England and Egypt, a passenger will go by land and sea to Cairo or Gaza, and there change into one of the new three-engined aeroplanes. But the essential importance of the route greatly transcends the saving of seven or eight days that will be made in the journey between England and India. Its real significance lies in the fact that it is the first section of the great Empire air route to the Far East. It is for us to consider whether the other sections could not be completed and a through air route created of incalculable importance for both military and civil communications. I do not wish at this stage to overburden the Conference with details. The Sub-Committee upon Imperial Air Communications will have an opportunity of fully investigating the possibility of the project that I am now discussing. May I, however, in passing, offer certain suggestions for carrying this proposal into effect that the representatives of the Dominions may desire to consider at their leisure?

Would it be possible for the Government of India to consider the question of extending the service across India from Karachi to Bombay and Calcutta? Would it be possible for the Government of Burma to consider the possibility of carrying it a stage further, to Rangoon? Might it not then be practicable to link with the civil line experimental flights of the Air Force flying-boats that it is intended to station in the Far East, and might they not again join up with occasional service flights of the Royal Australian Air Force from Australia? I do not expect answers to these questions at a moment's notice. I do, however, hope that we shall be able to consider them in some detail at the sub-committee. If in the not remote future links can be inserted in some such way as I have suggested, a long chain of great tensile power will have been forged across the Empire's framework.

An Empire Route through Africa by way of Egypt.

So also with Africa. Just as there must be an Empire air route to the Far East stretching to Australia and New Zealand, so there must be an Empire air route from London to the Cape with branches diverging to the West African dependencies. Here again a beginning—I admit, a small beginning—is being made during the next few months. An enterprising pioneer, with the help of the Governments of Kenya, Uganda, and the Sudan, has organized an experimental service covering one thousand four hundred miles between Khartoum and Kisumu. As the route follows the course of the White Nile the machines will be hydroplanes. If this service is successful, from ten days to a fortnight will be saved in the journey between Khartoum and Uganda, and eight days between Khartoum and East Africa. Why should not the northern and southern links be forged in this African chain, and a through aeroplane service run, at least experimentally, between Egypt and Cape Town? This would mean the addition of the northern link between Egypt and Khartoum and the southern link between Kisumu and Cape Town. I am prepared to say that we will attempt in the course of the training programme of the Royal Air Force to arrange for a certain number of flights, carrying mails and official passengers, to link up with the civil machines at Khartoum. Would it be possible for the South African Government to consider whether the South African Air Force could not make a certain number of flights linking up with the route in Uganda?

The first great African flight was brilliantly carried out by a famous South African pilot, whom we welcome here this morning. Whilst it would be impertinent for me to press unduly the South African Government, I hope that I may be allowed to say how greatly we should value the co-operation