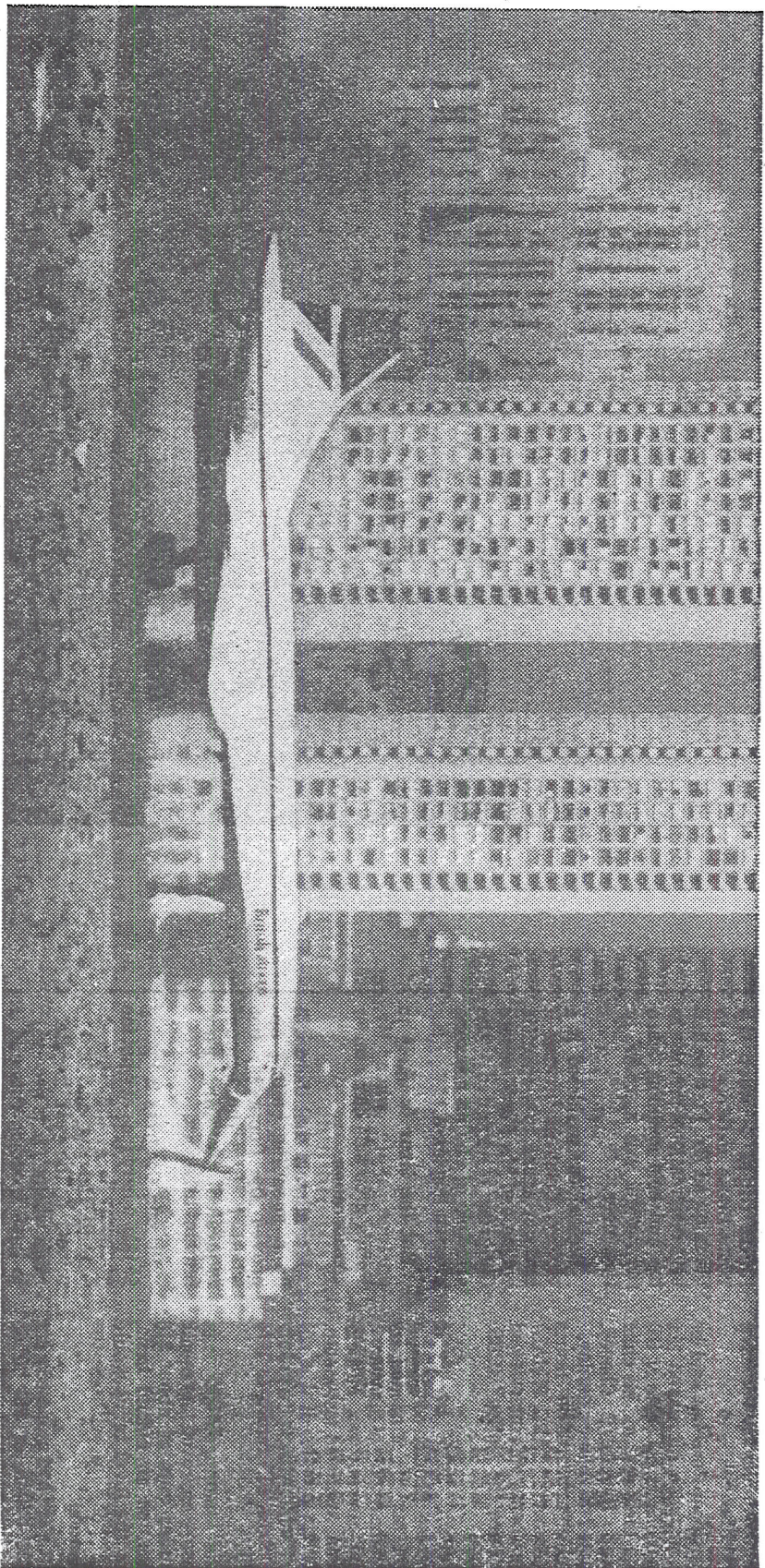


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# The Concorde

*The debate on the supersonic airliner, Concorde, enters its final stage today with a public hearing. Whether the Anglo-French aircraft should be allowed into the United States is debated here, at our invitation, by Rep. Bella Abzug (D-N.Y.) and Gerald Kaufman, the British Minister of State responsible for aerospace matters.*



# ABZUG:

*"The dream of supersonic transport aircraft has faded in the deepening problems of its reality."*

Like so many of the dreams of the sixties, the dream of supersonic transport aircraft has faded in the deepening problems of its reality.

One of the realities is that the supersonic transport planes are very noisy. Indeed, they are so noisy that there is increasing evidence that the noise they produce can be physically harmful. The use of SST aircraft in such airports as New York's Kennedy International or Washington's Dulles International will bring large sections of the population into direct contact with the noise produced by these planes. Those who oppose the SST landings at U.S. airports are concerned about the long-term effects on people of such severe and constant levels of noise. At Kennedy International, for example, almost 250,000 people not now within aircraft earshot will be subjected to 100 decibels of noise if the supersonic aircraft now in production are permitted to land at U.S. airports. At 100 decibels of noise level, conversation is limited to a distance of six inches using raised voice level.

There are also problems with the level of vibration accompanying the noise of the SST. More than 53,000 homes will be in the direct path of the SST as it takes off and lands at Dulles International Airport, according to a Federal Aviation Administration study. Vibration from the SST as it takes off and lands will in some instances set up harmonic vibration within the walls of individual houses. The result will be vibration several times greater inside homes than outside—vibration that may be great enough to cause damage to house structure, foundations and to

the furnishings and brittle objects (such as glassware or china) inside the house. Nobody knows the effects of this kind of vibration day-in-day-out on human beings. We do know that in some people biological rhythms are disrupted, and certain types of hormone production are limited by the effects of severe vibrations, but how vibrations from supersonic craft will affect the daily functioning of the people living near the airports is difficult to determine. This is not something we should ignore.

Supersonic aircraft travel at very high altitudes. The vapor trails produced by supersonic craft will have a deleterious effect upon the ozone layer of the earth. The depletion of the ozone layer by nitrogen oxides from the supersonic planes would remove our only protection from ultraviolet radiation. According to the National Academy of Sciences report on the Environment Impact of Stratospheric Flight, "The production of 16 Concorde supersonic airliners having present emission indices might lead in the long run to several thousand additional cases of skin cancer per year in the world, of which perhaps a thousand would be in the United States." The ozone layer does more than protect against skin cancer, however. It is an integral element in the worldwide climatic balance. There are no accurate methods of predicting what might be the effect of ozone loss upon the climate of the temperate zone, the zone in which more than two thirds of mankind resides, and the climate in which most of the world's food is produced. But, as Faust discovered, the

wealth provided by a new and unexamined capability is sometimes belatedly overshadowed by the hellish future waiting in the background.

The safety problem is a here-and-now question of making supersonic craft fit into the airport pattern of today. Air traffic controllers already have considerable problems with conventional aircraft in the difficult weather patterns. Now imagine supersonic aircraft in this situation. The supersonic craft has to arrive at U.S. airports with less than normal fuel reserves—almost empty. The British and French have asked for preferential treatment from U.S. airports for landing their craft.

As an internal FAA memorandum dated May 2, 1975, stated, "The Concorde is exceptionally fuel critical. Special procedures would have to include relaying anticipated delay information to the operator prior to scheduled departure." The Concorde and the Soviet TU-144 would be arriving at immense speeds. U.S. airports had 270 near misses between oncoming aircraft last year. What would be the situation when the supersonic transport arrives? We know this for certain; whereas "near misses" have a minute or two to get out of the way of oncoming aircraft, the supersonic craft will have only seconds.

As the fuel crisis of 1973-74 showed us, we cannot afford to waste our limited energy reserves. Yet, the supersonic aircraft burns fuel as if there were no tomorrow to worry about. For the same amount of fuel, the Concorde supersonic transport plane carries 100-125 passengers the same distance that the conventional subsonic jumbo jet

carrying up to 400 passengers. The Federal Energy Administration, in a letter dated May 6, 1975, to the FAA, said "We believe that sanctioning such fuel-inefficient air service sets an unwelcome precedent for similar future requests. Such action is incompatible with a United States energy conservation policy aimed at reducing non-essential and inefficient fuel uses."

There are also serious questions about the economic utility of the supersonic craft. We live in an era when fuel costs have made conventional air travel beyond the reach of many middle-class travelers. This is no longer the era of mass tourism. The waste of the supersonic aircraft will make ticket prices far higher than those of subsonic aircraft. What usage can we expect? The Federal Energy Administration feels that "it is not clear that the Concorde could fill consistently the number of seats it has, due to the high ticket price." An additional problem for U.S. airlines would be the loss of first class expense account travelers to the more prestigious Concorde.

The cost of the supersonic transport airplanes, in ecological, safety, and public health considerations, in fuel conservation and wastage problems, has complicated the ability of supersonic transport to fill our intercontinental transport needs in an era of economic recession and fuel shortages. The supersonic transport was a glorious dream of a decade gone by. We must not let it become the nightmare of the decades to come. We must keep it out of the United States.

# KAUFMAN:

Until seven months ago the ministerial office I held was undersecretary of state at the Department of the Environment. Environmental questions are therefore at least as important to me as to anyone else.

Britain and France, after 13 years of work, have produced a supersonic airliner with a full certificate of airworthiness, given only after the most rigorous study ever applied to any aircraft. All the signatory powers to the Chicago convention, including of course, the United States, accept the validity of these certificates.

In three weeks Concorde will enter commercial service. Air France will fly to Rio de Janeiro, British Airways to Bahrain, at the center of the Middle East oil states. Already consumer response suggests that it will meet a market demand for speedier travel. Ms. Abzug recognizes this.

So the question to be decided is very simple. Should an aircraft certificated as safe in accordance with international convention and not infringing any specific federal, state or other legal regulation of the United States be allowed to land and take off on specified occasions at Washington and New York? Our opponents such as Ms. Abzug argue that the very limited operation proposed will impose significant additional environmental burdens.

The British and French governments have environmental responsibilities to their own people and to their international partners. Britain is one of the very few countries with its own

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Department of the Environment. We could not support the airlines if we believed that Concorde was the ecological menace that current mythology and misquotation suggest.

We have treated environmental issues in a serious and responsible way. In the United States we have participated fully and voluntarily in the domestic process of investigation and have placed on the record a greater volume of environmental data than has ever been made available for any technological product, domestic or foreign. We have set up complementary programs on the stratosphere and have made all the data obtained on Concorde flights freely available to U.S. researchers.

Aircraft noise is a perennial problem. And Concorde is still noisier than we would wish—as many other airplanes are. But great effort and significant improvements have been made on Concorde. The design target for SSTs, proposed by the members of the International Civil Aviation Organization, including the U.S., in 1962, has been met. Concorde's noise characteristics, as measured by the procedures specified by ICAO, are broadly comparable with large narrow-bodied jets which make tens of thousands of flights annually into Kennedy and Dulles. The main question is whether the introduction of the Concorde services proposed would have a significant incremental effect on surrounding populations. The duration of the noise, the time at which it occurs, the number of times each event is repeated, as well as the intensity of

each event, need to be assessed. The "noise exposure forecast" (NEF) tries to do this. As the environmental impact statement (EIS)—a statement prepared by the U.S. Department of Transportation—shows, the change is very small indeed. At Kennedy, 485,000 people already live within the NEF 30 contour—that is, the area within which some of the annoyance may be experienced. Concorde flights could increase this number by a fraction of 1 per cent. No additional people will be included within the same contour at Dulles if Concorde operates.

As the EIS also states, the structural vibration of Concorde's engines is barely perceptible. Contrary to Ms. Abzug's claim, there is no possibility of damage to structures even if they are old or fragile; and such vibrations have no effect whatever on human beings.

One of the trademarks of supersonic aircraft is the vapor trails in the troposphere. This has no effect on ozone, except perhaps to prevent its depletion by exhaust gases. There is no firm evidence that small injections of the oxides of nitrogen in the stratosphere have any effect on the ozone layer, nor that small changes in the thickness of the layer have any effect on the incidence of skin cancer. In any case if such a charge was tenable, it would apply many times more to other incursions by man into the stratosphere. These, through aerosol propellants, fertilizers and supersonic military aircraft, have effects almost incalculably greater than the fleet of Concorde now being

built. Why pick on Concorde with its infinitesimal effects until the others have been dealt with?

Concorde is safe to operate. It carries enough fuel to fly 5,000 statute miles with full pay-load. The reserve fuel policy is essentially the same as for sub-sonic aircraft. The scare mentioned by Ms. Abzug is baseless. Concorde has already shown that it can operate within existing air traffic control and air transport procedures as well as any sub-sonic aircraft. When flying supersonic it also flies high, beyond the range of sub-sonic aircraft. There is no possibility of collision at great speed.

All aviation activities use less than 5 per cent of the world production of liquid fuel. Concorde will use a minute fraction of this 5 per cent. The fuel per seat mile for an SST is similar to that of executive jets, of which about a thousand are currently in use in the U.S.A.

The aircraft is safe in itself and safe to fly. It complies with current national and international rules. There is no objective reason to suppose that the effect of the operations proposed for the United States would have any significantly adverse environmental effect. What it will offer is a unique service to international commerce and communication. It should be permitted to do so, within the framework of existing international understandings, which have served both producers and consumers well for the last 30 years.