Rolls-Royce, of course, is sitting pretty whatever happens; 168 Lockheed airbuses have been ordered so far, a record start for any commercial airliner, and Rolls-Royce will be supplying at least three engines worth $2·5 million each for every one. Air Holdings, on the other hand, will, by 1973, be getting one airbus a month and so far it has not sold any. When it comes to selling, Air Holdings is, of course, entirely dependent on the technical backing of Rolls-Royce and Lockheed engineers, but, faced with the prospect of holding thirty aircraft worth some $600 million and no government aid, it is remarkably cheerful. It has been agreed that all the initial sales of the 1011 in the rest of the world, apart from the United States and countries to which the United States would refuse to sell the aircraft for political reasons, will be made by Air Holdings. With the European airbus not even off the council tables, let alone the drawing board and the ground—on Friday there is to be yet another crucial ministerial meeting—the 1011 has two competitors. One is the DC 10, ordered by United and American airlines in the United States and powered by a General Electric engine which is a commercial adaptation of the engine developed for the C5A military transport. The other is the Boeing 747. The four-engined Boeing is, strictly speaking, a long haul aircraft capable of carrying five hundred people and the smaller and shorter ranged Lockheed should be better suited for the European routes. It should also be at an advantage over its direct competitor, the DC 10. It is no secret that all the American domestic airlines would have preferred to have aircraft powered by the Rolls-Royce engine. In the world market, free from buy-American lobbies, that should prove to be Air Holdings' best selling point.

Imperial Demise

THE prospect of beer by the litre for British drinkers came a step closer last week. Mr Anthony Wedgwood Benn, the Minister of Technology, announced that the United Kingdom is to adopt the metric system of measurement by 1975—the target date already accepted by British industry for its timetable. The minister has accepted all the recommendations of the Standing Joint Committee on Metrication, which published a long-awaited report on July 26. The report says that a Metrication Board should be set up to organize the change, which should begin in 1971. Although these recommendations were widely anticipated (it was the Confederation of British Industry which first came forward with the suggestion for the Metrication Board), the Government's decision is nevertheless welcome. The industrial change is going ahead fast—two weeks ago the British Standards Institution published the final programme for the engineering industry—but the non-industrial sector of the economy and the general public have been lagging behind. The establishment of the Metrication Board will at least provide a chance for publicity, even if the coordinating function of the board remains somewhat nebulous.

The report makes it clear that there is not much time to waste. It is "imperative" for the planning of the change in the general sectors of the economy to be put in hand; if this is not done, "the dynamism of the industrial change will be lost". In order to have enabling legislation on the statute book by January 1, 1971, a Bill will have to be introduced in the Parliamentary session 1969–70. The programme will allow for a good deal of flexibility—some sectors will finish before 1975, some after. In the schools, the emphasis should shift from imperial to metric units by 1969, although major imperial units will continue to be taught for a few years after that.

The report dodges the difficult problem of producing a balance sheet for the change. "Both the benefits and costs of metrication are virtually impossible to quantify even for a single industrial concern." Nevertheless, the Government has asked the Metrication Board, when it is set up, to produce a sector by sector appreciation of the problems, including the costs involved. The cost–effectiveness of metrication is not therefore likely to be known until it is a fact. So far, certainly, hunch has played a greater part than has a sober analysis of the situation.

Reaction so far to the minister's announcement has been muted. Only one organization, the Business Equipment Trade Association—faced with greater costs than others—has made disapproving noises. The public still seems hardly aware of the revolution that is to overtake it—decimal coins by 1971, metric units by 1975. This is clearly an unsatisfactory state of affairs, and the Metrication Board would do well to try to encourage discussion of the change, if only to condition the public. The report does open the door, if only a fraction, to those who feel the change is an intolerable burden. It says that the Metrication Board should be responsible for making recommendations to the Government on special cases of hardship which might merit consideration for compensation. Mr Benn seems not to accept this argument; his statement said "There can be no question of compensation; the costs of adopting metric weights and measures must lie where they fall." But if the board does start to consider compensation, the number of protesters is likely to increase as if by magic.

Up in the Air

SINCE the British order for F111 aircraft was cancelled, and Anglo-French collaboration on the variable geometry aircraft broke down, the Royal Air Force has been without an advanced combat aircraft suitable for the middle and late seventies. For some months, however, discussions have been in progress between the British Government and the Governments of Belgium, Canada, West Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. These came to a head two weeks ago in Bonn, when four of the governments signed an agreed memorandum which takes them one step further towards the building of a joint strike-reconnaissance aircraft for the seventies. Although Belgium and Canada have not so far signed the memorandum, it is thought possible that they may join in later, as the project definition stage advances.

It is easy to make fun of international projects like these, with their continual horse-trading over design leadership and their apparent inability to move beyond paperwork. But there are some reasons to believe that this project may have better fortune than its predecessors. Certainly it is becoming increasingly urgent for Britain and some of the other countries involved to find a successor to their existing aircraft. All the air forces involved, except Britain's, fly the United States F104 Starfighter aircraft, which has had