

Reverse Propeller

Pressure on the White House has again produced a change in aviation policy, this time in the reversal of President Eisenhower's decision to cancel Northwest Airlines' route from Seattle to Honolulu. In this instance the protests seem to have been justified, and the President deserves credit for the tacit acknowledgment that he made a mistake. But why, then, did he upset the recommendation of the Civil Aeronautics Board in the first place? The CAB had unanimously recommended that Northwest's authority for the Seattle-Honolulu operation be continued and that the parallel route of Pan American World Airways be canceled. Now both routes are to continue, at least temporarily.

Quite apart from questions of economics, there are two things very wrong with this picture. In the first place, if the present decision is a right one, then the President did not investigate the situation very thoroughly when he undertook, apparently on the advice of Commerce Secretary Weeks, to overrule the CAB. In the second place, the manner of the reversal leaves the clear implication that the White House can be deflected from its purposes by pressure. There was evidence of this in the earlier withdrawal of a prospective nominee for the CAB after the White House was deluged with organized protests.

Now, protests and pressures are an inevitable part of the democratic system. What is bad is to permit them to become a substitute for independent judgment. Even though the reversal in this case may have been proper, the whole zigzag performance leaves international aviation in confusion and constitutes an open invitation for contenders henceforth to run to the White House. This is what inevitably happens when the President and his advisers attempt to take on themselves regulatory functions which, in the absence of compelling reason, ought to be left with the agencies established to perform them.