

National Air Policy

[English]

We intend to change that. A Progressive Conservative government will empower the Canadian Transport Commission to ensure safe and reliable air service for Canadians; it will not empower the CTC to stifle competition.

We will encourage more competition on major national routes, starting with CP Air's request to serve eastern Canada.

We will significantly increase the routes open to regional and third-level carriers. It makes sense to have major trunk routes served by national carriers; it makes no sense to allow them to dominate regional and local services. Our general approach will be that regional routes of up to 300 miles and turn-around routes of up to 500 miles will be reserved for regional and third-level carriers.

As a further step toward increased competition—so that Canadian consumers can enjoy the widest and most economic choice of air travel plans—we will loosen the totally unrealistic restrictions this government has placed on charter and other special package fares.

There is a basic element of Canadian air policy virtually neglected by this government and which we, as the government, will correct. I refer to the need for the closest possible integration between Canadian air services and Canadian aerospace manufacturing. This government has no policy to ensure that the market from an expanding Canadian air travel industry is available to Canadian aircraft manufacturers. We will have such a policy. We in this party, when it is our responsibility to form the government after the next election, will insist on such a policy on a priority basis.

One aspect of it will be to encourage the maximum use of STOL aircraft like the Dash-7 to service local routes. Expanded competition on such routes will expand that market. We will further support it—as recommended by the Air Industries Association—by assisting the development of short take-off-and-landing facilities at regional airports instead of wasting the taxpayers' money on more white elephants like Mirabel.

Those will be the major elements of our domestic air policy. It is a policy based upon competition, based upon the evidence that the role of the Government of Canada principally should be to set the rules and not to intrude automatically by reflex simply because government wants to control everything in the private sector.

It is quite clear that we have a long and admirable history of innovation and risk-taking by many people involved in the airline industry in this country. Recently I was in Gander, Newfoundland, with one of my colleagues. I had an opportunity denied most Canadians, because this government has sealed it off, to see the air museum at Gander airport. In passing, sir, it might be of interest to the House to know that the museum can be seen by foreign visitors to Canada, but unless one has a special pass or happens to be leader of the opposition, it is not seen by ordinary Canadians for some reason known only to this minister. The Government of Canada has sealed this museum of Canada's past from the eyes of Canadians present.

[Mr. Clark.]

It was an interesting experience to go through some of the displays at Gander. By virtue of its location as the easternmost extension of this continent, Newfoundland was deeply involved in the earlier flights across the Atlantic. Much of the aviation history of this continent touched on that province and its coast. Looking at the displays I became aware again of the high qualities of innovation that existed through time in the Canadian airline industry and with the people associated with it. One becomes aware of the imagination, the willingness to face risks and to rise to the risks that exist in that industry on the part of the people associated with it.

Those of us who come from different regions of the country, certainly those of us who have a respect for the private sector of this country, know that Canadians involved in regional airlines, Canadians involved in private airlines and, indeed, many Canadians involved in the management of Air Canada, are themselves still seized with that sense of innovation, that ability to imagine, that ability to build. The problem is that they have been literally flying blind as an industry because there has not been any context of national air policy established by this government. That lack of policy has cost Canadians in terms of the fares they pay, in terms of the service they receive, and in terms of the possibilities that could exist in this country for Canadian airlines to take advantage of Canadian manufacturing.

● (1542)

That is a failure that lies squarely at the doorstep of this government. It is one of the policies we, as a new government, intend to change. It is a failure that this motion and this debate in the House of Commons today is designed to help draw to the attention of the Government of Canada and to the people of Canada so that they will know that they need not put up much longer with the incompetence and the continuing refusal to establish a context for national air policy which has been characteristic of this government and of this minister.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McRae: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Would the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) accept a question?

Mr. Clark: Certainly I will accept a question.

Mr. McRae: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition indicated in his speech that he saw some difficulty about and was opposed to the notion of Air Canada remaining in some points of northern Ontario. Is it the policy of the Leader of the Opposition to remove Air Canada service from North Bay, Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, Timmins and Thunder Bay? Because those are the only points where Air Canada is in contact with northern Ontario.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I must say that that question is in the character of the attempts to sow fear and indeed sow confusion and almost hatred among Canadians which has become so marked among members of the other side—