

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): The hon. member for St. John's West.

An hon. member: St. John's East.

Mr. Ross Reid (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I have always followed the member for St. John's West.

I plan to be fairly brief in my comments on Bill C-85. I wanted, however, to put a couple of things on the record. Our colleagues across the way keep falling back to the U.S.-Canada bilateral and also to the question of deregulation. I think it is important to comment on those and a couple of other items.

On the question of the Canada-U.S. bilateral air agreement, I think it is important to recognize that this agreement which was signed in 1974 is obsolete. We recognize that air traffic and air transportation are absolutely critical in economic development and in regional development. I think most of the members of this House will recognize—and certainly those who know something about Atlantic Canada do—that we depend quite heavily on air transportation for passengers and for freight but they also directly relate to economic development and to our ability to expand our economic opportunities in the regions. This agreement was signed in 1974 and does not take into account the numerous changes in the economy, and the numerous geographical changes in the country, that is economic geography obviously, not the physical geography of the country, and the need that new industries have for transportation back and forth across the border with the United States.

• (1630)

Americans already have access to most of our major cities. Meanwhile Canadian carriers have access to a considerably smaller percentage of American cities. American carriers handle over 60 per cent of transborder traffic than do Canadians and earn \$500 million more annually from this market than do Canadian carriers. That is an important consideration as we look at the renegotiation of this agreement.

We need to ensure that the Canadian carriers can effectively compete in the liberalized regime, and that the ongoing viability of the Canadian industry is protected and encouraged because it is the employment of the thousands of people who work for those airlines and the airports that they service, and the people who depend on those airlines, that we are talking about.

In terms of the bilateral agreement, it is important to recognize that we phasing in a number of the aspects of this and providing safeguards.

A number of my friends across the way have talked about sovereignty. It is important that we recognize right from the start that Canadian carriers will operate as Canadians and U.S. carriers will operate as Americans. National rules of ownership and control will remain in place and the right of establishment in the other's country will not be permitted.

We have had comments about safety. I want to talk briefly about safety. Whatever airline of whatever nationality that flies in this country, flies under Canadian safety regulations, not the regulation of their own country and not the regulation of another country. Any air carrier that flies in this country flies under the safety regulations of Canada. Our safety record is among the best in the world.

I would just comment on this little remark about the tower in St. John's, Newfoundland, what we know colloquially as Tor Bay. From 12 midnight to 7 in the morning, that tower would not normally have air traffic controllers in it. It is a situation that I do not like and a situation that I have spoken out against, but a situation that I understand and a situation that for now, I accept.

But I think it is absolutely critical to recognize two or three things. TransAtlantic traffic and traffic in the region is not handled out of St. John's and therefore will not be affected. Traffic in and out of St. John's will continue to be handled by radio operators who work 24 hours a day in St. John's, Newfoundland.

A great number of airports in the country, including a number in Newfoundland and Labrador do not have air traffic controllers in their towers. Some have no towers, but they continue to operate with flight service support. However, should the category two instrument landing system in St. John's, Newfoundland be needed to bring in the later commercial flights, personnel will be maintained in the tower.

It is important that we not make gratuitous and irresponsible statements in the House pertaining to air safety. I just wanted to set the record straight on that.

Let us go back, if we may, to the bilateral agreement with Canada and the United States. The government since 1985 has been trying to reopen that agreement,