

Oral Questions

upon safety, we have to be in a position to monitor it very carefully.

● (1120)

We could go and set up a special task force or a special team to conduct a far more intense series of examinations and inspections on board Eastern Provincial Airways. We have authorized Mr. Sinclair, the Air Administrator, to take actions, such as pilot separation, if in his judgment after receiving these detailed reports he feels the situation is reaching a point where there could be incidents or situations which might lead to a safety problem. We are trying to anticipate, to preempt, to provide a preventive situation just to make clear such a situation would not happen, and to give a very clear signal to the airline that it must resolve that issue in order that safety will not be threatened.

REQUEST FOR INVESTIGATION OF EASTERN PROVINCIAL
AIRWAYS

Mr. Tom McMillan (Hillsborough): Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Minister of Transport. He must be aware that public confidence throughout the Atlantic region in EPA has eroded substantially in recent months. It has to do not just with safety but also with the level of service being provided by EPA. Flights are being cancelled summarily, departures and arrivals are consistently late, and even the airplanes themselves leave an awful lot to be desired. In light of those facts, would the Minister be prepared to launch a full scale ministerial investigation of Eastern Provincial Airways, not just a task force having to do with safety, to satisfy himself and the public as well that Eastern Provincial Airways is meeting its firm commitments to the Atlantic Provinces under federal charter as the regional carrier.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I think we have been taking a number of extraordinary measures over the past several months to ensure that the operations of Eastern Provincial Airways will not be affected by the labour dispute through which it has been going. We have to be very careful. I know my colleague, the Minister of Labour, has been very watchful of the situation that, as a federal Government, we do not intervene in that labour dispute directly, which is a matter that must be resolved between the parties to the dispute.

The basic principle of our labour relations conduct has been that we do not try to come down one side or the other in such a dispute. We have to honour that requirement until or unless it gets to the point, as I said in response to the previous question, it may begin to impinge upon areas that would threaten public safety. That is why we took the preventive actions that we have taken. If there are service problems, those are problems that can be clearly brought to the attention of the Canadian Transport Commission, and that is why the CTC is there.

Mr. McGrath: The Minister is ultimately responsible.

Mr. Axworthy: The CTC is in the position of being responsible for judging whether public convenience and necessity under the National Transportation Act are being met. If there are charges that they are not being met, then they can be brought forward by individuals, or by provincial authorities, or others. I think that is really the course of action to take. If the Hon. Member can cite a number of incidents that he would like to bring to my attention, I will be quite happy to take them to the chairman of that commission and he can follow through. I think we also want to be careful that you do not undo or injure the service of that airline because it is a very important ingredient in the whole transportation system of the Atlantic region, and you have to strike a balance.

Mr. McMillan: Mr. Speaker, the Minister has missed the point entirely. There is overwhelming evidence that we have here an airline under federal charter in deep, deep trouble, to the point where the very safety of the travelling public is being jeopardized.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

RESPONSIBILITY FOR ENSURING SAFETY OF PUBLIC

Mr. Tom McMillan (Hillsborough): Mr. Speaker, what will it take for the Minister of Transport—a major catastrophe—to take his responsibilities seriously? He cannot slough this off to the Canadian Transport Commission. He is ultimately responsible. Will the Minister accept his responsibilities as Minister of Transport to investigate a very serious problem that is threatening the safety of the travelling public? What will it take for him to accept those responsibilities if the evidence has missed his attention already?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I would say the first question of responsibility is a responsibility of Members of Parliament in this House not to engage in sensational tactics in which the last Member of Parliament just engaged.

Mr. McGrath: It was a CBC report.

Mr. Axworthy: This is not a matter with which to play sensational politics. It is a serious issue.

I have outlined the steps we have taken to provide a preventive system to ensure that there will not be safety problems. I have authorized the Air Administrator to take immediate action if any of the reports he receives from his team in any way suggest there is a jeopardy. The kind of statement just made by the Hon. Member really does not do him any good, the airline, or the people travelling. That is the most irresponsible statement I have heard by a Member of Parliament in a long, long time in this House.