

Supply—Transport

It is an urgent matter because the arrangements that have been made with TransAir to take care of the route that was abandoned by Air Canada when it decided to go out of regional operation and move into a trans-Canada and international role are to expire in mid-April. This matter is giving grave concern to the officials of TransAir as well as the communities served.

I hope the minister will initiate negotiations with this regional air carrier and provide the company with some concrete program or arrangement to make it possible for them to carry on this important service. What they need, of course, is an arrangement similar to that operated by the government of the United States, where direct subsidies are paid to regional carriers in order for them to continue their service on an economic basis.

While Air Canada indicated at the time it withdrew from this service that it was no longer interested in competing in this traffic, it should be brought to their attention that they are playing an unnecessarily competitive role. For instance, just one year ago TransAir reorganized the route from Winnipeg to Prince Albert via Brandon, Regina and Saskatoon. As soon as they improved the efficiency of the service and reorganized it, Air Canada immediately commenced a parallel service. Of course a small regional carrier such as TransAir just cannot compete with a big government sponsored organization like Air Canada.

This is an urgent matter. It is important to general air transportation in the west, and I trust that the minister will give it his immediate attention.

• (9:20 p.m.)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Grégoire: Mr. Chairman, since the beginning of the debate on item 1 of the Department of Transport, it has been easy to see that this item is the worst wasps' nest of the Canadian government as far as strengthening Canadian unity or destroying it are concerned. We have heard speakers who, one after the other, have talked about the branch lines in their constituencies stating that they were insufficient and also mentioning that they lived in Canada and that there should be a railway in their area, in short in all parts of the country. Each of them also spoke of his local problems and this proves that today there is much to be done in the field of transport to connect all parts of the country and satisfy every constituency.

Well, in turn, I would like to call the attention of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pickersgill) to a few local problems.

First, I would like to speak about the airport at Bagotville which serves the Saguenay, Lake St John, Chicoutimi, Lapointe, Roberval areas. We have, in Bagotville, a very small airport that dates back a great many years and is far from adequate. A few days ago, perhaps five or six, perhaps three or four, a snowstorm swept down on the Quebec, Saguenay, Lake St. John area. At that time, some airplanes had to land at Bagotville, while others could not get off the ground, so that, at a certain time, in the midst of the storm, there were more than 175 people trying to get into the terminal which is not much larger than the Minister of Transport's office. If all the ministers were trying to get in the Minister of Transport's office at the same time, the minister would not have any space for himself. On this occasion, three Viscount aircrafts, with about 60 passengers each, were held up at the Bagotville airport; as a matter of fact, the terminal was so full that there was not enough room and people had to stay outside in the snowstorm.

I must say it is a disgrace for the Canadian government to have such an air terminal in an area that is developing like the Saguenay-Lake St. John area. As I said a while ago, the waiting-room is not larger than the minister's office; there is no restaurant for the people who have to stay there during long hours before boarding another aircraft, whenever the planes cannot take off on account of a snowstorm. There is no restaurant nor any of the facilities that are usually found in air terminals. Therefore, I believe the Minister of Transport should do something, all the more because such an improvement has been requested for at least four years now, in fact since I came to this house. For at least four years, we have been told that something would be done about that terminal.

This airport was promised to us by the former government, and again it is being promised to us by the present one. Six or seven months ago, we were told that an appropriation had been made, that the plans were ready; nevertheless, during the last election the hon. member for Chicoutimi (Mr. Langlois) promised this terminal to us again. I ask the Minister of Transport whether he could give us tonight a clearcut statement indicating when work on this terminal will begin and when we can hope to have it. I