

Air Canada

[Translation]

AIR CANADA ACT, 1977

MEASURE RESPECTING REORGANIZATION OF AIR CANADA

The House resumed, from Thursday, November 3, consideration of the motion of Mr. Lang that Bill C-3, respecting the reorganization of Air Canada, be read the third time and do pass.

Mr. Donald W. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak briefly in this debate because I would like to call the minister's attention to an unacceptable development at Victoria International Airport, the bilingualization of security agents in that airport. Oddly enough, orders to that effect were issued in the name of Air Canada's president rather than the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang). I will come back to this later.

[English]

In May of this year, a general instruction issued by Air Canada contained the requirement that the security checking teams clearing passengers through airports across Canada possess competency in both of Canada's official languages. Presumably this was pursuant to recommendations made to the president of Air Canada by the commissioner of official languages in his report of 1976. In this report, the sixth annual report of the commissioner of official languages, there was a recommendation specifically directed to Air Canada. I suggest it is an unusual recommendation. It appears under the heading "Bilingualism Policy and Guidelines for Implementation". It is recommendation No. 58, and reads as follows:

—wherever the word "practical" appears in reference to the use of the two official languages, delete it.

Then under the heading "Job Security" appears recommendation No. 68 which reads:

—ensure that the job security of its personnel is not jeopardized in implementing the recommendations listed in this report.

I find this second recommendation completely comprehensible since it applies to all of the Air Canada recommendations. I should like to turn to another document, one which I suggest is much more official, issued by the government. I suppose it might be called the "grey paper" on the official languages of Canada. It is entitled "A National Understanding", and I should like to refer to chapter 4, page 44. I have checked the English and the French versions, and they are identical. At page 44 the following appears:

Canadians should be able to communicate with, and to obtain service from, the federal institutions of government in the official language of their choice and arrangements should be made to this effect wherever there is sufficient demand for it.

I relate the words "wherever there is sufficient demand for it" to recommendation No. 58 of the commissioner of official languages, which reads:

—wherever the word "practical" appears—delete it.

I find a certain inconsistency there, Mr. Speaker. I think all members of the House would subscribe completely to this particular guideline. Canadians should be able to communi-

cate with, and to obtain service from, the federal institutions of government in the official language of their choice. That is fair enough. It goes on to say that arrangements should be made to this effect wherever there is sufficient demand for it.

● (1542)

Aside from my puzzlement as to why Air Canada should issue this general requirement in this area, Air Canada did not, as far as I know, make any attempt to determine the need at the Victoria international airport for competency in the French language by the staff at that checkpoint area. What triplicates the puzzlement in my mind about that basic instruction to the security check personnel is that they do not speak to the passengers. What this amounts to—and it becomes farcical, if not absurd—is that they are looking for mute bilinguals. I find it difficult to understand why, at the Victoria international airport—where there has been no attempt to determine the need, as far as I know—they are seeking to recruit mute bilinguals.

I know that if the need should arise for use of the second official language at Victoria international airport—and this has happened in the past on rare occasions—in half an hour at the very outside, and more often in a matter of minutes, it could be satisfied. Bilingual people could be obtained very quickly, as there are French language teachers in the area and, in fact, bilingual employees at the airport during normal working days, all of whom I am sure would be happy to come forward and help. However, I find it quite absurd to insist, under this requirement, that there be competency in this particular area of the airport's activities.

When I got wind of this requirement I immediately wrote to the president of Air Canada. That was on September 20 last, some six weeks ago. I have not yet received a reply. I assure the House that I wrote to him outlining the extracts I have put on the record from the "grey paper" issued by the government. I wondered why he had found it necessary, at the Victoria international airport, to put forward this particular recommendation. I am still awaiting a reply to my letter. In the meantime, I must admit that he has succeeded in stirring up a veritable hornets' nest of aggravation in the area. There is no need for such aggravation at this time, in face of problems currently confronting this country. Certainly, there is no need for that kind of aggravation being thrust upon the community in this area.

I indicate, also, that two years ago a similar thing happened in respect of the car rental area, where a bilingual requirement was to be laid down. I intervened at the time. I asked members of the car rental area to check and find out how many times, at the Victoria international airport, there had been a requirement for the use of the other official language. I asked how many times they had been asked in the French language, during the years they had been operating there, about the possibility of renting a car. The answer was that it had not happened even once.

I agree completely that we should have bilingual forms, but I am puzzled by the requirement I have mentioned, when there