

*Air Canada***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

AIR CANADA ACT, 1977**MEASURE RESPECTING REORGANIZATION OF AIR CANADA**

The House resumed, from Wednesday, November 2, 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. Douglas Roche (Edmonton-Strathcona): Mr. Speaker, I do not think you will find my comments as provocative as those we have already heard this afternoon. But that is not to say they are without some importance, especially for the people I have the honour to represent in this chamber. I want to assure the House that it is not my intention to delay unnecessarily the progress of Bill C-3, but I intend to make a short intervention.

I think it is necessary to support and emphasize the remarks made by the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) last night when he began the debate on third reading of the Air Canada bill by speaking of the very real need to improve the services at the Edmonton international airport as a way of carrying out the services this bill is intended to provide. After all, if we are to be concerned about improved management of Air Canada and improved service in the air, it makes little sense to be concerned about those things without, at the same time, being concerned about improving service for travellers when they are on the ground and, particularly in Edmonton, to be concerned about breaking the log jams which occur there.

● (1602)

I recognize that the reorganization of Air Canada will be of major importance to the travelling public in our country. As one who has, as I am sure have so many of my colleagues in this House, flown half a million miles in my parliamentary career, I think it necessary to emphasize that without the improvement of ground services relative to the increasing speed with which air passengers are transported, the air transportation policy, particularly as it affects western Canada, makes little sense.

I want to assure you, Mr. Speaker, it is not only the present I am concerned about, but the future as well. It is clear that the west is emerging as the pre-eminent economic force in the life of Canada. We see the balance of economic power shifting westward. It is the west, and particularly northern Alberta because of its position as the gateway to the north, that will provide the cutting edge to a strong and stable economic future for Canada. As Mr. Justice Hall recently noted:

It would not be too much to say that the Alberta gateway to the north provides a setting for the national dream in a contemporary context.

If this is true of rail service, which Mr. Justice Hall has been studying so deeply, how much more true it is of air service, in the new era we have entered. The cut in the allocations by Treasury Board for certain alterations and expansions will have profound implications for air travellers,

[Mr. Pinard.]

particularly those using the international terminal in Edmonton. These things are of great concern, not only to myself and members from the Edmonton area but to members representing constituents who in increasing numbers use the airport serving northern Alberta. As a matter of fact, we are assured by no less an authority than the general manager of the Edmonton area air service commission, Mr. Allan Bleiken, that 1.2 million passengers per year now use the Edmonton airport and that very shortly the number will be in excess of 2 million.

The cut from \$28 million to \$5.6 million will mean that the minimum required improvements to the Edmonton airport will take place, since the \$5.6 million has been applied to secondary improvements such as parking and baggage facilities. While these are important by themselves, they do not address themselves to the central question in that airport, which has to do with needed structural changes to enlarge the gateways and, secondly, the necessity for preclearance for passengers travelling to the United States. In a letter written to me recently, Mr. Bleiken writes:

The decision by the Treasury Board will result in serious air service problems for the citizens of Edmonton and for visitors to our city.

The way in which the cutback has been announced, following repeated assurances that Edmonton would be in line for increased facilities precisely because of the growth of passenger traffic in the area, was peremptory and ill reflects the need to strengthen the development of transportation services as a means of enhancing the economic development of the west, particularly Alberta.

The structural expansion of the airport would enable Edmonton to handle the large sized 747s and 10-11s that are now becoming part of the service in the province of Alberta as part of the over-all transportation system moving westward. The conditions which result from larger-sized planes now using an airport designed for smaller jet craft with services planned in the 1950s, although the airport was opened in the early 1960s, demonstrate that the facilities are now outmoded. I think it is time we put this question to the minister: Will he not give consideration to reopening the matter with Treasury Board? The argument of restraint, or that there is expansion at other airports, particularly Calgary and Mirabel which have taken the money that would otherwise have been available to Edmonton, needs to be re-examined.

I think it would be helpful, Mr. Speaker, if I read a passage from a letter I received from a distinguished Edmonton citizen, Mr. Robert Matheson, a former councillor of that city. He chose not to run in the recent municipal election, so speaks now as a private citizen, but out of his experience and study of transportation questions affecting Edmonton. He writes:

I have been one of the greatest advocates of restraints in all government spending whether municipal, provincial or federal, but the federal Ministry of Transport action in rejecting the completion of the minimum requirements to provide Edmonton with a transportation facility which is absolutely essential, having regard to our position as the gateway to the north, the seat and centre of a vast industrial expansion and the site of the Commonwealth Games to be carried out in 1978, is, without qualification, uncalled for, unfair and completely discriminatory.