

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[English]

A motion to adjourn under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

AIR CANADA—EXPLOSION AND FIRE ON FLIGHT 141, TORONTO TO CALGARY

Mr. Ken Hurlburt (Lethbridge): Mr. Speaker, on March 25 I put a question to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) regarding flight 141, Toronto to Calgary. I asked for a full report on the flight plus a report regarding how many in-flight engine failures we had had on Air Canada during the past year. I was on a flight from Toronto to Calgary on March 23. It started as a normal flight, a few minutes behind schedule owing to repairs to a minor, technical item: at least, that was the reason Air Canada gave for the delay. During the flight the engine exploded and caught fire. Many of the passengers were frightened. Three businessmen from the city of Lethbridge said that the plane was shaking as if the wings were going to fall off. The purser of the plane said there was a seven-foot gash in the fuselage.

● (2200)

The curious thing is that Air Canada has since decided that the incident did not occur as we passengers saw it occur. Air Canada and the minister responsible for transport says it was a minor incident—just the falling off of a piece of metal used to streamline the engine; there was no fire, no serious problem and no danger to the passengers. Obviously, the people who said that were not on that plane.

The fire indicator indicated no fire, but the vibration indicator was registering the maximum. The fire indicator was not indicating a fire because it was not working. Air Canada says it was not working because it was damaged when the piece of metal flew off. It must be a very useful indicator if it quits functioning the minute anything goes wrong! Another curious thing about the fire indicator is that it had already malfunctioned once and that was the reason the plane was delayed in Toronto. Officials said they had fixed it there and it broke immediately after as a result of the engine problem. It seems much more likely that this thing was not correctly fixed, and the attempt to fix it may even have been the reason for the engine problem.

The government still claims that the incident was minor. Since I raised the question in the House I have received letters from fellow passengers, all in support of my view of the occasion. The minister's replies to my earlier questions suggested that "the engine did not catch fire or explode after take-off from Toronto". That seems pretty clear, yet the maintenance report on the flight reads:

Arrived YZ ramp (Toronto) with log snag 861. Explosion and severe vibration number 3 engine. Hydraulic loss.

The report suggests there was no fire warning of any kind, but very severe vibration with the vibration indica-

Adjournment Debate

tor full-scale following the initial explosion. The second officer reported a ring of fire around the nose bullet flange. I ask, what is the minister trying to sell us when he says there was no explosion? Is he suggesting I could not see what I did see? The experts of Air Canada say there was an explosion but the public relations people of Air Canada say there was not.

The incident itself is over but it has raised several important questions. For instance, how safe is Air Canada compared with other airlines, and why is the government unwilling to investigate the matter openly and honestly? The government has told me that I and my fellow passengers did not see the things we saw. It has hidden the question. Air Canada has not appeared eager to open the subject, either. As I reported to the press, there was a lack of morale, no one knew what was happening, the service was bad and most of the time there was almost chaos.

Canadians have a right to know how safe their airlines are; they have the right to know whether their tax dollars are being spent for a dangerous and secretive airline or whether their money is being spent on a good provider of transport for the Canadian people. At the moment the government does not wish the people to know about Air Canada. In face of repeated efforts by the chairman of the transport committee, the hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski), and many others, the government continues not to allow the committee to study Air Canada's annual report.

There may be some excuse for strictly government concern with Crown corporations when they are running well, but when Crown corporations are expensive, ill-managed and a danger to the safety of Canadians it is high time the representatives of the people of Canada had a say in what is being paid for with their money.

Mr. Marcel Prud'homme (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) has sent two letters of reply to the hon. member. The second letter went into greater detail than the first in response to the hon. member's second query. At this point I can only reiterate the facts as they have already been stated.

On March 23 an Air Canada DC-8 en route from Toronto to Calgary developed an operating problem in its No. 3 engine shortly after take-off. The engine was shut down and the aircraft returned to Toronto, as is normal procedure. Passengers were transferred to another aircraft to continue their journey. There had been no problem earlier between Montreal and Toronto. The incident was reported immediately that evening to the ministry of transport, Canadian Press and the CBC.

I am sure my hon. colleague from Lethbridge—Lethbridge is a beautiful town which I know very well; I still have in my office the flag given to me by the mayor—will be interested to know that what passengers reported as fire was most probably the glow of sparks caused by rubbing of the engine's fan blades on its stainless steel case. An overhead bearing caused the bullet nose cowling and a portion of the side cowling to become detached. The bearing ignited a small oil and magnesium fire within the engine. I am sure my hon. colleague could not see within the engine. However, as provided by the engine design, it