

results that could flow from motions put before the House by members from both sides. If we fail to recognize that fact in respect of the private members' hour I think we not only do a disservice to this Chamber, we impair in the strictest sense the interpretation of the rules and prerogatives of the Crown in respect of raising and spending money.

A close examination of the bill would indicate a proposed transfer of professional expertise from the ministry of transport to an independent commission which would, in turn, report to another level of government. It could be argued that this commission would in fact not spend an additional five cents. If the bill in its present form is imperfect or is lacking in a technical sense because of the rules of this House, I am sure that we would be only too pleased to accept any appropriate change.

What we are pleading for is an opportunity to speak publicly to Canadians in respect of the transportation industry, while at the same time speaking to members of the treasury benches and our colleagues in the House. I suggest there is a sense of urgency because we have such accidents as the dramatic and tragic one that occurred near Wabush not so many months ago. I suggest this accident was the result of an error situation. The investigation of this accident indicated that there was an internal error. The difficulty involved is that the regulatory body charged with the responsibility for investigating the accident might be said to be encumbered by a real possibility of a conflict of interest. Even if that conflict of interest was imaginative, I suggest our attempt to discuss this matter this afternoon is fully justified. The number of deaths in air accidents in recent years has been on the increase, just as the number of deaths has increased in respect of railway accidents and accidents involving buses and trucks engaged in interprovincial commerce. In 1971, for instance, there were 1,100 accidents involving vehicles engaged in interprovincial transportation.

What we are attempting to do is restore not only national but international confidence in the manner in which we investigate transportation accidents in Canada. We cannot continue much longer to convince ourselves that there is not a distinct possibility of a conflict of interest. If we continue to do so, instead of being in the vanguard of transportation modes in the world we will find ourselves very far behind. The United States and Great Britain have already moved in this direction, while France and Australia are presently deeply involved in the overhaul of their system of transportation accident investigation procedures. They are doing this, as I would, not with the knowledge that a conflict of interest exists, but with the knowledge that there is the possibility of a whitewash being attempted. I am not suggesting this is the case, as we have one of the finest investigative systems in the world.

My bill does not attempt to raise money, it attempts to redirect the structure of the instruments and tools of investigative procedures. These instruments and tools already exist, so I am not proposing the raising of money for that purpose. Indeed, it is quite possible that such a commission as I envisage could well come from the accident investigations branch, the steamship accident investigations branch, or other similar areas. I do not envisage the raising or the spending of money for this purpose, but

Transport Commission of Inquiry

rather the reallocation of money in a way which would preclude forever in the minds of all those interested in transportation the possibility of a conflict of interest.

I need not remind hon. members of this House of the great difficulties that can arise when a conflict of interest seems to be present in a number of given situations. This is not fair to the men who conduct these investigations, and it is hardly fair to the department. Indeed, for several years I have wondered why the department has not brought forward a bill for consideration by this House which would do what I am suggesting today. Again, all I am suggesting is that we separate these functions and establish under a separate entity the prime jurisdiction with regard to all accidents, simply assigning that responsibility and jurisdiction to various existing bodies.

● (1720)

I am not asking for the expenditure of money. A commission of this nature, whether funded by present means or not, is of no importance to the transportation industry. What they have wanted for a number of years is the removal of any possibility of conflict, no matter how remote. The Air Line Pilots Association, the Canadian Owners and Pilots Association, steamship associations, our trucking associations, people who work in the field of rail transportation, have all expressed concern from time to time in recent years, not that there is a conflict of interest, but that there have been so-called whitewashes, cover-ups, and so on. I am not concerned that that is happening because to the best of my knowledge it does not. But there is continuing concern that a conflict of interest could exist and a whitewash would result.

It is possible that an impartial and honest investigation might be impaired, and if it were the consequence is obvious. Others involved in transportation will not have available to them the serious, thought-out conclusions of an investigative team, and without that the ability to avoid future accidents might be impaired. I do not think it is unfair to suggest it would be impaired in direct proportion to the degree to which information might be withheld.

I have never been entirely satisfied with the procedures and methods used in releasing details of air traffic accidents. I have received countless letters in the last month or so from departmental officials which I am sure, if they came into the hands of the transportation industry in this country, would leave it appalled.

I am not, as I say, asking the House to spend money. I am asking the House to consider in its wisdom referring the subject matter, if not the substance of the bill, to the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications. I would withdraw the bill this afternoon if I thought that next week we would be given the opportunity to look into this matter carefully. Had there been no question in Your Honour's mind about the procedural acceptability of the bill, within not only the rules of the House but the prerogatives of the treasury benches, I would have dealt in much greater depth with what is happening in this regard elsewhere in the world. I have spoken of the international experience and would have drawn the attention of the House to the fact that we are almost alone in the western world in our failure to remove the very wide possibility of conflict. I would have indicated my regret about that and