

● (1700)

The need for action in this area is urgent, and the degree of urgency is increasing with the passage of time. I do not wish to burden the House unduly with statistics, but the number of train accidents—incidents, perhaps—is running well in excess of 4,500 annually. In 1970, there were 787 accidents involving trucks. In 1972, there were 1,429; the number had almost doubled. The same trend is noticeable in the case of registered aircraft—500 accidents in 1969 and 715 in 1973. Even a cursory review of the statistics will show a similar trend in all the media of public transportation where federal jurisdiction is involved. The number of marine fatalities continues to rise. In 1969, over 400 vessels were involved. Well over that figure was recorded in 1973. What is obvious from all the statistics is that we should be more concerned than ever about the manner in which we proceed with the investigation of these accidents.

My files continue to grow as correspondence flows in from all segments of the transportation industry as well as from the travelling public who, after all, must look to parliament to produce legislation which will make their travel, whether for business or pleasure, as safe as possible. Moreover, we should ensure that when accidents do happen the circumstances lend a little more knowledge to the governing bodies concerned, so that eventually travel can be made safer. Of even greater importance, the investigation of these accidents should be free from any possibility of conflict of interest.

We talk about conflict of interest. In this connection let me point out that the Air Accident Investigation Branch of the Ministry of Transport is responsible for NOTAM. I see the parliamentary secretary in his place across the way. I suggest that this is not what is required in the interest of safe travel and efficient safety and accident investigation in Canada. I shall not refer at length to the bill in my name which has been before the House for a considerable period; I have been through it on a number of occasions, after all, but I do wish to read into the record the explanatory note which accompanies that bill. The measure is entitled "An Act to provide for the constitution of a Federal Transport Commission of Inquiry (Impartial investigation of transport accidents).

The purpose of this bill is to establish a permanent but impartial commission of inquiry to investigate transport accidents which are within federal jurisdiction. Under present laws, many of these transport accidents—perhaps resulting in loss of life—are investigated by the federal body which is responsible for making and enforcing the rules under which the transport operated when the accident occurred. There is an obvious conflict of interest in such cases.

The commission I propose in this bill—and I note that this proposal has received the widest possible support from the various transportation sectors in Canada—would have exclusive but selective authority as against any other federal body to investigate all accidents resulting in death, injury, or property loss involving any transport under federal authority. However, the commission need not exercise this authority in cases where it felt the public interest would be sufficiently served through an investigation by the appropriate federal regulatory body, that is, in cases where the federal body would not be impeded in its investigations by a conflict of interest.

I go on to suggest in this bill that the commission should also have authority to investigate safety standards and

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practices and to recommend changes. I propose, further, that the commission should report its findings and recommendations, if any, to parliament so as to provide opportunity for public debate. Provision is made also for any person whose conduct or judgment becomes an issue during the investigation to appear and be heard, or, in the event of his death or other disability, to have his interests represented by a person appointed by the commission.

The application is as broad as possible. It covers transport by rail, by air, by water, by pipeline in the course of moving bulk material from one province to another or beyond the limits of any one province, by motor vehicle and so on. This will mean consideration of the Railway Act, the Aeronautics Act and the Canada Shipping Act in addition to other legislation. I think it is understood that we are dealing here with transportation involving a connection between two provinces. Since the philosophy is sound, transport by aircraft, ship or motor vehicle used by Her Majesty in the right of Canada is also covered, the implication being, of course, that accidents involving modes of transport owned by the several government departments, including the Armed Forces, the RCMP and other somewhat separated Crown agencies like the CBC, should be included.

I think it is important to review this principle for a few moments. The area of precedent that comes to our attention is that other western countries, for example the United Kingdom, have separated this responsibility for regulatory authority, if you will, from the investigative responsibility. The United States started to take this very firm step 10 or 12 years ago and finally separated the responsibility totally about eight years ago, in fact in 1966. Australia is now moving very rapidly in this direction, but Russia and France continue to hold out, although France is in the process of looking very seriously at the validity of such a move. Virtually all western nations have moved toward the removal of any possibility of conflict of interest, but Canada, as I have indicated, remains certainly alone on this continent in not having done this.

● (1710)

I do not think this is because we fail to recognize the importance of this. I do not want to be political about it and perhaps I should be generous to our good and charming parliamentary secretary, as I know he is somewhat in sympathy with this proposal, by suggesting it is because we have not found the useful vehicle or means for doing so. I hope that in the minister's review of the needs of his department in respect of reform he will find high on that list of recommendations to his colleagues in Cabinet a procedure which will remove this responsibility to an independent commission. It is time to end the uncertainty that we create in this manner in the minds of our friends in other nations, as well as in Canada, in the various sectors of the transport industry.

I should like very much to see the substance of this bill referred to the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications. We sought in the past to have this subject raised in the committee. We would like to hear evidence, and hear what the various sectors of the transport industry have to say about this. I have been somewhat surprised in the last three, four or five years that the government has not acceded to even this simple step. We