

The solution that has been offered by many politicians and economists of late is increased productivity. In the past 10 years Canadian farmers have increased productivity on a per man and woman basis probably faster than any other group in our economy. Yet they were rewarded by having their real net incomes cut in half.

The Minister of Finance, in his Budget which is soon to be presented to this House, would be wise to remember that if a recovery does exist in this country—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Hon. Member's time has expired.

● (1115)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

AIR TRANSPORT

SAFETY OF TRAVELLING PUBLIC—REQUEST FOR MINISTERIAL ASSURANCE

Mr. Pat Nowlan (Annapolis Valley-Hants): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport. I know that he has been making numerous press statements. In light of the safety hazard problems revealed in the federal Government's report on Air Canada, plus yesterday's very expensive smoke in a 727 cockpit which forced an emergency landing in Winnipeg, the day after weedless Wednesday, and the news that the Minister has ordered daily monitoring of safety on Eastern Provincial Airways, can he assure the House that the safety of the travelling public is not endangered?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I think that all these measures clearly demonstrate that safety is very much a No. 1 priority, both of my Department and of the Government. We have taken unusual steps, first, by establishing for the first time a comprehensive audit to examine the full operating and maintenance activities of Air Canada. We will be undertaking that program on a regular basis with all the major carriers, so that there can be a regular system of full scale examinations to determine what corrections or improvements might be made.

That audit itself clearly pointed out that the safety standards in Air Canada are very good ones, but in any system there is always room for change and improvement and that is the purpose of the audit, to draw attention to where we can provide for some structural and procedural changes. It does demonstrate that we are very much committed to ensuring that there is both proper maintenance, and certification, and observation of the safety activities of our airline systems.

WORKING RELATIONS BETWEEN DEPARTMENT AND AIRLINE COMPANIES

Mr. Pat Nowlan (Annapolis Valley-Hants): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister for the answer, as far as it goes.

Oral Questions

In view of the fact that the audit does point out certain specifics that should be corrected, and also underlines something called "coziness" between the Department of Transport administrators and Air Canada officials, what does the Minister intend to do about that, and when, so that the safety regulations will be enforced and administered as definitively as possible?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, under what is called a letter of privilege the Ministry of Transport transfers to airlines a number of activities for which they are in a sense self governing, or self examining. One of the primary findings in the audit which we are recommending is that many of those requirements for standard setting and maintenance would be taken back and we would be pursuing those activities more rigorously. That is now under way through discussions between my officials and Air Canada about how recapturing those responsibilities will take place, to make sure there is a very clear demarcation line between the regulatory requirements and safety area and the activities of the airlines themselves.

I think the Hon. Member knows from his own experience that there must be a close working relationship between the airlines and our Department. There is much shared information and knowledge. At the same time, however, the audit did point out that, particularly in the airworthiness standard setting and the certifying of some of the maintenance activities, those activities should be taken back by the Ministry of Transport, which we are now in the process of doing.

EASTERN PROVINCIAL AIRWAYS—EFFECT OF LABOUR RELATIONS DISPUTE

Mr. Pat Nowlan (Annapolis Valley-Hants): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister for helping to clarify this situation which I think is causing unusual concern across the country.

I would like to ask him specifically about the EPA situation and the disturbing news that federal inspectors are reporting daily on safety procedures of EPA, and especially on the tension in the cockpits due to the ongoing labour strike. When will corrective measures be taken to resolve this very untenable and unhealthy situation?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out yesterday, the technical standards of EPA are certainly being met. If and when there may be incidents that would transgress those, they are immediately reported and action is taken. The Hon. Member would probably know that just last week we issued two show cause orders to two pilots because of incidents on landing and in certain areas where they did not meet the minimum equipment list. We will be taking those actions immediately.

However, as a result of the very bitter labour situation that has evolved in that airline over the last several months, there is a feeling that if the tension level—the measurement of which is sometimes indefinable because there is no technical standard to use—and the psychology that works there, begin to impinge