

*Statements by Ministers*

the right to examine this statement in more detail by bringing out a huge fan to blow away the smoke, and by bringing out a construction crew to fold down the mirrors in order to ensure that we see the statement for just what it is.

We have a saying in the Province of Newfoundland. Of course, it is known across the country. It is frequently used in Newfoundland, namely, belling the cat when people try to present themselves as being all things to every special interest group. In addition it has been said that you cannot be half pregnant. The Government is today trying desperately hard to be half pregnant on the question of in respect of Air Canada and Air Canada's role within the country and within the country's transportation needs.

The most incredible thing in the statement of the Minister is that on the one hand he tells us that Air Canada needs to be privatized because it has reached a certain point in its existence and evolution where only privatization will allow it to be successful. On the other hand he spent some minutes in his statement telling us what a wonderful airline it was, that it is a leader in the world. In fact, Air Canada was the recipient only a few years ago of a major international award recognizing its contribution to airline travel in this country.

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On the one hand, the Minister of Transport (Mr. Bouchard) is telling the people of Canada not to worry, Air Canada will continue its important public policy role. On the other hand, this Minister assures us that when we pass over the shares, it will be at arm's length. The Government will not tell the board of directors what to do. It will be entirely in the hands of the private sector. It will run this airline. Before he can draw another breath, he is again assuring us that the public purpose, the public policy and the public need will be looked after.

By now Canadians are wondering how we will identify what the public need is, and then ensure that that public need and purpose is fulfilled, when in the same breath we say it will be at arm's length, we will have nothing to do with it, the private sector will run it. Is the Minister really saying that Air Canada's public purpose will be fulfilled as determined by the private sector? That kind of a public purpose as determined by the private sector is far and away different from what may be the public purpose, the needs of the people of Canada as determined by the Parliament of Canada.

Let us examine the most blatant contradiction in the Minister's statement. It was a very interesting one. The statement that was made today was extremely sensitive when it was drafted. It was tailored to the fact that there is an election in Manitoba. In the written copy of the Minister's statement, there are a couple of summary pages, and I find this amusing. These are pages seven and eight in English and later pages in French. Let us examine what the Minister tells us. It is a delight to be here. We do not need any more preparation time.

The Minister tells us first that the Minister responsible for privatization will retain the Government's shareholding. The

Government will retain 55 per cent after the first offering. In the first offering 45 per cent of the shares will be privatized. The Minister says that while we are a majority shareholder, the Minister responsible for privatization will hold those shares but will not intervene in Air Canada's commercial decisions. Did everyone hear that? That is qualifier number one.

What is qualifier number two? The Minister says that the Government will instruct the chairman of Air Canada's board of directors, the government-appointed chairman, to vote his shares in accordance with the majority of public shareholders. The chairman of the board who works for the Government and will continue to have 55 per cent of the shares will be told that he is to vote in accordance with what the 45 per cent of the shares that have been privatized are saying.

Number one, we will not exercise our majority position. Number two, our guy on the board will vote with the private sector which holds the minority position. That is qualifier number two. Do we all have that?

Now what is the next incredible thing the Minister says? The Minister then says that he wants to assure us that Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg are sources of great pride to Air Canada. Maintenance bases have been built up in those areas and all three of those bases will be continued. He goes on to say that they will be continued as the airline builds for the future in the new market-driven environment, and this was for the Manitoba election, that the Winnipeg overhaul base will continue as a prominent and integral function of Air Canada and Air Canada's fleet will continue to be maintained there.

How can the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Mazankowski), in good conscience, stand in the House and set out conditions which make it clear that the Government will no longer have any say in the operation of Air Canada, yet make clear that the minority shareholder, the privatized shares, will be running the show; that it will be a clear arm's-length relationship in the one breath and in the very next breath, for political purposes, tell the people of Manitoba not to worry because the base will be continued? The Minister cannot make that statement, and he knows it.

That is what I mean when I say that this Deputy Prime Minister is attempting a very difficult proposition today, which no one has yet managed, and that is to be half pregnant. The Deputy Prime Minister cannot assure the people of Manitoba who are in the middle of an election campaign and for whom this statement was crafted—the smoke and mirrors will disappear on April 26, the date of the election—that they will have the maintenance base, the many jobs and the technology in that regional centre, when he told them in his previous breath that it is the private sector, at arm's length from the Government, that will determine the future of this airline. He cannot have it both ways.

I say that what the Minister is really telling the people of Manitoba—or for that matter, the people of Toronto, the people of Montreal and the people of Stephenville, Newfoundland, from where I come, a place that now has an Air Canada