

Air Canada

Ms. Copps: It was a great meeting, Mr. Speaker. In its usual entrepreneurial fashion, the Liberal Party was selling things. We will do anything to dig our way out of debt. Last night at the Liberal Party nomination meeting in Ottawa—Vanier the hottest button for sale was going for \$2. It was available from Carleton and University of Ottawa students and read: “Privatize Mulroney”. I think that speaks to the notion of what the Government has been doing to the country over the last number of years.

My Leader said that the recent free trade agreement, which was finally tabled in the House, could best be called the “Sale of Canada Act”. The Act that we are currently discussing in the House tonight for the privatization of Air Canada is another example of how the Government does not understand that our country was built on an east-west axis. Our country was built on the notion that there is a role for the private sector to play but that there is also a role for the public sector to play.

● (1830)

What would have happened in 1867 if the first Prime Minister of Canada, Sir John A. Macdonald, said that we would not build a Canadian railway but would let the private sector do it? What if they believed that there was no role for the public sector in a national rail system?

What if successive Governments said that about building the Trans-Canada Highway, probably the longest unified highway in the world that is maintained by public funds? We believe in links both from the public sector and the private sector.

Unfortunately, the government is so driven by a need to privatize that it does not recognize that there are certain integral links that keep this country hooked together from East to West. They include the CBC, a national broadcasting system whose integrity the Government, with its backroom committee, has been trying to cut back.

The same is happening with this sale of Air Canada Act. That may not be so serious if it were not for the fact that the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) gave his own solemn oath. Do Members recall his sacred trust about senior citizens' pensions? The Prime Minister said about Air Canada: “Air Canada is not for sale. Canada needs a national airline”.

Mr. Nunziata: Who said that?

Ms. Copps: That was stated by the Prime Minister of Canada.

How can we believe a person who says one thing on the campaign trail but, immediately upon being elected, sets an agenda to do exactly the opposite? The Prime Minister said over and over again that universality was a sacred trust. He promised senior citizens that the Conservatives would not touch their pensions because seniors worked hard for those pensions. Now we see the same about face.

[*Translation*]

... the same about-turn, the same hypocrisy with regard to Air Canada. I did not say, Mr. Speaker, and neither did the Liberal Party say that Air Canada was not for sale. We need a national airline. Those are the words of the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney).

[*English*]

What we are talking about tonight is a trend initiated by the Prime Minister, exacerbated by the free trade agreement, and increased by the Air Canada Bill which attempts to sell off the very nature and spirit of what we have developed as a sovereign nation. Our country has combined the best of the public and private sector. Unlike our friends to the south, we do not always believe that the private sector can do things better. We do not sell blood for profit in this country.

Frankly, I am glad that if I have to go to the hospital for an operation I do not have to check my credit card in to get blood for a transfusion. Yet, are you aware of the fact that blood banks are included as a potential service arrangement in the free trade agreement?

The Americans have always believed that one can make money from blood. If the poorest of the poor and those who need a dollar can be persuaded to stand in line in certain states to give their blood for money, they will sell it to the highest bidder.

However, we have created in Canada a society that has always believed in a primordial role for the public sector to play for the purposes of culture, broadcasting, and transportation.

That is why the first Conservative Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, pledged to the country that a railway to link East and West would be built at public expense. Similarly, when airlines became part of the technology, the Government and the nation decided to establish a national airline because we believed the public sector should be involved.

It may not be financially profitable to travel to Inuvik or Tuktoyaktuk. That may not be in the best interests of the bottom line on the balance sheet of a private corporation, but Canadians believe that there is a responsibility to service the far-flung corners of Canada by air, by rail, or by road. That is why successive Liberal governments endorsed the concept that a Crown corporation could play a role.

In one fell swoop, the Government is saying with this legislation that Air Canada is no longer a Crown corporation. However, in the typical Conservative Neanderthal way, the Government is trying to have it both ways. It is suggesting that it is only partly selling off Air Canada. That is like being partly pregnant. It is similar to the abortion resolution introduced by the Government in which one is for it, against it, or in the middle.

If the Government is intent upon privatizing a Crown corporation, it should come forward with specific legislation.