

● (2052)

Two government departments are working against each other, Mr. Speaker. The Department of Regional Economic Expansion has been providing funds to assist regional development, while the Department of Transport has been downgrading the air service so essential in this modern era, to the extent that there is no air service of any kind. To make it even more ridiculous, removal of the air service came at precisely the time a brand new terminal was built at Brandon to serve that part of Canada. It was opened by the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Jamieson) then Minister of Transport, whose personal appearance underlined that this was a most significant development in transportation for that part of western Canada. No sooner had the air terminal been opened than air service was withdrawn, and I do not have to emphasize the stupidity of that decision.

I am sure the reason the present administration comes under such growing criticism is because of its lack of rational, economic leadership. It just did not make any sense at all. It became an issue in the 1974 election and the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) made a special trip to Winnipeg, where he appeared with the hon. member for Winnipeg South (Mr. Richardson), who was then a member of his cabinet. He has since resigned—I suppose in utter disillusionment and disappointment. At that time it was stated emphatically that air service would be restored at the earliest possible date. Mr. Speaker, that was four years ago and we still do not have air service.

The provincial government of Manitoba attempted to supply a commuter air service to this part of Canada. It was opposed by the Minister of Transport who said it was not adequate and that he wanted to give western Manitoba and eastern Saskatchewan a first-class jet service. This was encouraging, but the minister went further and said he would subsidize not only a commuter service but also a first-class jet service east and west on a daily basis. That is precisely the air service we require. Bids were called for, and Transair made an excellent proposal which was to be processed by the air transport committee. Then there was another development. Negotiations for the takeover of Transair by Pacific Western Airlines were commenced, approved by the Minister of Transport, and so we were back to the drawing board.

You can understand, Mr. Speaker, why there was so much frustration and why there is so much participation in this debate by members from the province of Manitoba.

When a former Minister of Transport who has now moved to the other place, the Hon. Jean Marchand, had responsibility for the portfolio, he hinted that a possible solution was for Air Canada to resume its responsibility to provide quality service and move us into the jet age as had been provided for in the 1950's and 1960's. I have made inquiries of the present minister from time to time and it seems that he is moving in this direction as well. Certainly with Transair out of the picture there is no private carrier that would take on the responsibility.

Air Canada

This legislation gives the minister the power to arrange for one flight per day each way and to use the brand new terminal facility that has been sitting idle for four years. The service could fly in from Regina to Brandon and go straight to the east if necessary. There is a potential market of 150,000 people who at present have to drive to the international airport at Winnipeg, often a distance of 200 miles. Each time I return to my constituency it takes me as long to drive from Winnipeg to Brandon as it does to fly from Ottawa to Winnipeg. This in the year 1977, Mr. Speaker, when the second largest city in Manitoba, Brandon, should be part of a first-class jet service. People still have to drive a long distance and pay substantial parking fees for their car while they are absent. There is plenty of parking at the new Brandon terminal which I am sure would be an added economic attraction to the people of western Manitoba and eastern Saskatchewan who must have rapid, reliable air service if they are to maintain their place in the economic development of Canada.

Some members have mentioned the improvement in Air Canada's service in recent months under the new chairman, Mr. Claude Taylor. I can vouch for that from personal experience. I am sure he would be sympathetic to any gesture by the government to restore the quality service Air Canada once gave to this region of Canada. The latest statement of the minister was in a press release on September 9, 1977, when he pointed out that there is going to be a meeting of minds. It reads in part as follows:

● (2102)

Transport Minister Otto Lang and Air Transport Association of Canada President Angus Morrison jointly announced today that the government and the air transport industry have instituted discussions aimed at developing a new policy for domestic airline service, including mainline, regional and local service carriers.

There needs to be no further discussion respecting the problem I have outlined here, because the gentleman named in this release, Angus Morrison, who is the president of the Air Transport Association of Canada, was formerly actively associated and identified with Transair and was one of the moving spirits in putting forward the proposition that Transair should be given permission by the Air Transport Committee to provide daily jet service in and out of western Manitoba. Obviously he is a convinced individual, and in his current responsibilities he now has direct access to the transport minister.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I am hoping that in the very near future we will have the announcement that Air Canada will pick up this responsibility, that there will be the further announcement that the infrastructure necessary for making it possible for Air Canada to fly into Brandon airport is ready, and that this will take place within the immediate future since it is a policy which has been delayed now for four years. It came up as an urgent issue during the last federal election, and it begins to appear that it is going to be an "urgent issue" in the next federal election. I urge the Minister of Transport to use the authority given to him under this legislation to do what he says he wants to do, and to do it as quickly as possible.