

*Government Orders*

• (1335)

I notice the minister of agriculture is present in the House. Certainly there are agriculture issues which need to be brought to the front burner. We encourage members on the opposite side of the House to bring forward those very pressing issues.

Yes, we will give support to the common sense bills brought before the House like Bill C-71, but let us see a little more substance. Let us see a little more meat to deal with.

The bill to amend the Explosives Act will allow Canada to formally participate in an international convention on the marking of plastic explosives for the purpose of detection, a very worthwhile cause. The purpose of the convention is to make sure that as many plastic explosives in the world as possible are able to be detected by legal authorities mostly in airports to stop terrorism.

We all use airports, except perhaps the members from Ottawa who I am sure stay home all the time. We recognize the importance of safety and the importance of being able to detect explosives so that our air traffic continues to be safe. It is an anti-terrorism bill. Therefore I can give my hearty endorsement to the piece of legislation.

After the Air India tragedy and the PanAm bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland in the late 1980s, the United Nations passed two separate resolutions both in 1989. One was passed by the security council and the other by the general assembly. These resolutions urged the International Civil Aviation Organization, another U. body to intensify its work on an international regime for the marking of plastic explosives for the purpose of detection.

Out of those resolutions was born the convention I have already mentioned. It was put forward in Montreal in 1991 and was signed by 100 nations. Although Canada signed as well it did not have the legal authority to ratify it. The bill will grant Canada the ability to formally ratify the convention, another reason to endorse the legislation.

For the last four years research has been ongoing to consult with the industry and develop an appropriate chemical marker. It has been developed in labs in New Jersey. Now is the time to move forward.

Unfortunately the convention will not take effect until 35 nations become signatories, 5 of them producer nations. Five nations which produce plastic explosives need to sign this agreement. I understand that five producer countries have signed, among them Slovakia, Switzerland, Norway, the Czech Republic and Spain. Canada will be the sixth producer country to sign. This still means that only 13 countries including Canada will have legally ratified the convention. That is a long way from the 35 that are needed to actually put the wishes of the convention into reality.

I agree that the ordinary terrorist without international connections will be harder pressed to obtain material that will escape detection devices. Therefore the convention is a positive thing.

Interestingly the United States has signed the convention but as yet has not introduced legislation to ratify it. We talked with the explosives industry organization in Washington, the Institute of the Makers of Explosives. It endorses the convention and said that the Federal Aviation Administration, the lead agency in America dealing with the issue, may introduce legislation soon to ratify it but nothing has been done to date.

We have not had an incident for a long time like the Lockerbie incident or the Air India disaster. The urgency unfortunately has died down somewhat and the issue has probably taken a lower priority. I hope it will not take another tragedy to bring the issue to the world stage once more.

For whatever reasons the convention is not in force right now and therefore it really is not relevant right now. Probably until the United States recognizes it, no significant countries will join in ratifying the law.

The amendment to our own act will continue to be irrelevant until we do something on a political level to bring the United States into the game. Until that happens nothing will ever get done and airline passengers all over the world will be at greater risk from the plastic explosives going undetected in aeroplanes.

A couple of weeks ago the member for Fraser Valley East called on the Minister of Natural Resources to urge her American counterparts to do something about it, to urge them to go ahead and ratify the convention so that other nations would come on board. My colleague has since received a letter from the minister saying that the Americans are already working on legislation implying that there is no need to address the problem.

• (1340)

We would reply that the Americans have been working on it for years with no action. The minister needs to express her concerns directly on a political level to her American counterpart and we are calling on her again today to do that. We want the minister to call her American counterpart and bring him up to speed on the issue. We urge the United States to move on the issue and formally approve the convention so that we can keep terrorism where it belongs. Of course it does not belong at all.

The minister also promised in her letter to participate in an American study that will examine the cost and benefits of marking conventional explosives that are being used in the biker bombings in Montreal to see whether it would be cost effective to identify all explosives and not just plastic explosives. We are pleased to hear that Canada will take part in this study and we look forward to the results.