

Bilingual Air Traffic Control

Mr. Fraser: But the contract is still before the courts. Its validity has not been determined. How can the government prosecute in such circumstances?

Mr. Mazankowski: Mr. Speaker, since similar incidents in other sectors of the labour force have occurred, and the government has not proceeded with such indecent haste, if I may use that expression, why has the minister and the government taken the present, adamant position in the present situation?

Mr. Fraser: Particularly as the matter is still before the courts and is not resolved.

Mr. Mazankowski: Particularly as the issue is still before the courts, as my colleague says.

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly why the issue is before the courts. That is where it will proceed, and I do not intend to comment on the subject.

Mr. Fraser: Precisely. It is before the courts.

Mr. Lang: With regard to the question of broad policy, I say to hon. members that there was a time when hon. members opposite would say in every case, "You should not proceed because this would be the first time," or "because you did not proceed the last few times," and so on. We made it clear that this had to change. The law has to be respected. Therefore, when an injunction is issued it ought to be followed with action. I have made that position clear and I have followed that course throughout.

Mr. Fraser: But the validity of the contract has not been determined, and you are prosecuting.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I, along with the hon. member for Vegreville, am concerned to establish stability with regard to air traffic in this country. I want to see good will prevail on the part of those who oversee our air traffic, namely, the air traffic controllers. Can the minister, for the benefit of the House and the country, state that in the selection of Mr. Chouinard and Mr. Sinclair the air traffic controllers were consulted, and whether they agreed to the selection of those two individuals to carry out this commission for the study of air safety?

● (1540)

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, earlier we had asked the controllers to suggest names—we meant in the plural—in order that we might look at those persons as possible commissioners. Certainly, once we had made the decision that it would be better to move to the judiciary for the commissioners, it would have been inelegant to begin discussing the merits of one or another of the commissioners. Therefore, there was not discussion in that sense, although I did have a discussion about the appointments, prior to their being made, with various elements within the dispute representing both CALPA and CATCA.

Mr. Horner: I very much regret the minister's answer. In order to attempt to clarify this, did not the air traffic controllers agree to Mr. Keenan to carry out this commission originally? Was it not the belief of the air traffic controllers that the faith demonstrated by the minister and the ministry in the first instance would be continued in the

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second instance? I very much regret the fact that the minister now says he did not fulfil the obligation that they would be consulted.

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member misstates the situation with regard to an earlier occasion. The earlier occasion was indeed a reason for my not expecting that full consultation, to the last bit of consent, would have been successful. The earlier occasion was evidence that that would not work. In the earlier situation we had submitted certain names to the controllers as possible commissioners, and received no response about those names. We then determined the possibility that Mr. Keenan might be available, and concluded that it would be a practical impossibility for them to disagree that he was acceptable. We indicated his name to them before we proceeded to appoint the commissioner, but received no response. It was really a question of my not wanting to be in the position of having to incur further delay.

Mr. Orlikow: Mr. Speaker, the country is now faced with a stoppage of air service. It is obvious that for some time there have been serious misunderstandings and profound disagreements between the minister and his senior officials and the controllers and pilots. If we are to have a resumption of service in the very near future, why did the minister not propose the appointment of a commission or commissioner and set the terms of reference 2½ weeks ago? Why did he not even at this time discuss with the organizations concerned the people he would appoint and their terms of reference, so that we could be assured even today, as I doubt we are, that the organizations concerned are willing to accept the appointment of the commissioners, the terms of reference and are willing to go back to work while the commission is working? Why did he not do these things earlier? Also, will he have any assurance before tonight that he is likely to get an agreement with regard to the working of this commission and the employees going back to work today or tomorrow?

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, even now I cannot give any assurance about where we will be moving from here. Indeed, it was exactly for that reason that I asked for the full support of hon. members opposite in urging that we resume normal air travel while the commission gets on with its work. The reason I did not take a certain course of action, and so on, was that it probably would have been more likely to exacerbate the situation than heal or cure it. Therefore, I will take the liberty of not going into that question in detail.

Mr. Orlikow: What consideration, if any, has the minister and his department given to the fairly quick bringing into operation by the controllers much more modern equipment and instrumentation such as that used by controllers in the United States, which I understand would make the plotting of movement and safety much easier? Further, it might have facilitated the agreement of the controllers to implementation of more bilingualism than they have been prepared to do until this time.

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, we have, of course, an ongoing program for the improvement and renewal of equipment. I have no reason to believe that that program, or the state at which it is, would have affected the current dispute.