

Labour Crisis in Aircraft Industry

Speaker, under standing order 26 for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely the crisis in the aircraft industry caused by delays and confusion in air defence policy, involving mass lay-offs and threatened disintegration of this important sector of our Canadian defence production.

Mr. Speaker: May I say that the purpose of this statement appears to me to come close to the provisions of the standing order under which leave is asked to move the adjournment, except possibly for the phraseology of the clause, "caused by delays and confusion in air defence policy." This clause is reminiscent of the first amendment on the address in reply to the speech from the throne. However, before I put the request to the house I shall be glad to hear briefly any representations as to why leave should not be granted.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prime Minister): I rose earlier, before Your Honour, for the purpose of saying this. The attitude taken by the government with reference to this motion is that if Your Honour feels it comes within the rules, the government will welcome the fullest discussion of this subject today. After all, none of us has any monopoly in our feelings for our fellow men. In that spirit I place the matter before Your Honour, firm in the belief that if the opportunity for discussion takes place it will be welcomed on the part of my colleagues and myself.

Mr. Speaker: I am not sure whether the hon. member who is asking leave of the house would be prepared to drop the clause which reads, "caused by delays and confusion in air defence policy", which seems to me to be a subordinate clause in any event which could open the door to a wider debate than would be justified.

Mr. Hellyer: I have no objection, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: With the request under rule 26 in the amended form, it appears to me this is a matter of urgent public importance of recent origin for which there would be no opportunity of debate until next Monday at the earliest, and therefore it appears to me to come within the rule.

I will read the request of the hon. member for Trinity again:

Mr. Speaker, I ask leave to move the adjournment of the house under standing order 26 for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely the crisis in the aircraft industry involving mass lay-offs and threatened disintegration of this important sector of our Canadian defence production.

[Mr. Hellyer.]

Has the hon. member leave of the house to proceed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Hellyer: Mr. Speaker, under ordinary circumstances it would be very appropriate on this day to discuss the history, the growth and the development of the Canadian aircraft industry. It is just 50 years ago today that the first powered flight of an aircraft in the British Empire was made at Baddeck, Nova Scotia, by Hon. J. A. McCurdy in his Silver Dart. This should be a day of rejoicing. It should be a day of applause. It should be a day when we can sing our gratitude in praise of the magnificent growth and development of the industry during those 50 years.

On that day 50 years ago the sun of Canadian aviation rose in the east. Last Friday it went down. Today we hope that what we are doing is not paying our final respects, but assisting in an early recovery. Mr. McCurdy himself, I am sure, dared not dream of the magnificent progress which has been possible in the half century since and of the far-reaching events which would take place. It is a pity that our discussions today cannot take the form of a national celebration, but rather that we should have to discuss what we believe to be a great national tragedy.

Some of us were shocked by the government's decision to cancel the Arrow program. Most of the surprise and shock was on account of the way in which it was done, with no suggestion for an alternative project to take its place. It is worth while to take a look at some of the things the Prime Minister said in his statement to the house last Friday, and I propose to do that briefly if I may. I do not intend to make a lengthy statement on defence policy, but I do think it is necessary at this time to discuss some of the contentions made by the Prime Minister in his statement and some of the inevitable consequences to the aircraft industry and to the Canadian people.

It was reassuring, first of all, to hear the Prime Minister pay tribute to the Arrow aircraft and the Iroquois engine; to hear him say that they have been a success, and that they had shown promise of fine technical performance. We believe this was a well deserved tribute to a fine team of inventors, technicians, scientists, production engineers and the whole company of men who put the aircraft together. The Prime Minister commended those who had designed the aircraft and translated the plans into reality, but then he went on to say that they had been overtaken by events; that the bomber threat had diminished, and that alternative means