

Air Canada

I regret that I did not see the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain rise before the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier).

Ms. Marion Dewar (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, it is with some sadness that I rise to speak to this Bill. I certainly urge Members of the House to support Motions Nos. 4 and 6 because they could make a bad Bill a little better.

We know that historically it has been important for Canada to have a national carrier, and it is tragic to be faced with legislation such as this.

These motions would ensure that the Government will implement in the legislation the kinds of policies it says exist. It is well known that Air Canada has the highest standards of security and maintenance anywhere in the world. We want to maintain that standard. The experience of Eastern Airlines in the United States shows how badly the standards have slipped there as a result of more competition through deregulation. That possibility exists in Canada. If the Government does not accept these motions, it is simply saying that it does not care. But many Canadians are concerned about the quality of our air carriers and their standards of maintenance and safety.

Some three weeks ago I was on an Air Canada flight from Toronto to Ottawa. I spoke to a gentleman who had boarded the plane close to midnight, after travelling from the southern states since the early morning. He explained to me how pleased he was to be on this airline because he had been travelling all day, with nothing to eat, on airlines that had been overbooked. He said that he had missed one important meeting because these damn fools think that deregulation improves services".

• (1320)

As Canadians we have to appreciate that we have the carrier we have. I said, "We have two carriers like this". He agreed and said, "We are so lucky to have that kind of thing but we won't have it for long. We will be back into the same thing".

Mr. Grisé: You are opposed to small business. Are you opposed to small airlines and small business? That is the socialists' philosophy.

Ms. Dewar: It seems to me that we have to look at other people's mistakes and instead of reinventing the wheel and making the same mistakes, we should benefit and protect ourselves from the disasters that have happened in the airline industry south of the border.

We have an airline that is now making money. We are asking in one of these motions for customer services to be retained. I want to see that protection built in for customer services. Very often you are talking about the ticket agent in the smaller community earning about \$30,000 a year. That is not an exorbitant salary. It might be the kind of wages this Government would like to save by reducing them to \$6 an hour. The present customer service allows the airline to make a

profit. Air Canada has not been in a deficit situation; it has been making a profit. It is about time the Government recognized that.

Sometimes when I hear that Conservatives understand business I think, God help us all if we are left with those kinds of business decisions. Their understanding of business is to de-employ the population, make a lot of money for a few and not worry about services anywhere else. Look at what has happened in the United States. You talk about cheaper airfares, but we know that there are cheaper airfares for travel to the main centres; not good service, but cheaper fares. What happens in the more remote areas? We know that those fares, if there is any service at all, become very expensive. That should not be tolerated in this country. We hope that we will have an election soon so we can get rid of all this bad legislation before us.

Motion No. 6 attempts to protect the pension funds of the people who have paid them. We have seen the experience of certain private owners and what they have done with pension funds. We must protect those funds for the people who have been the contributors. Surely that is not too much to be asking of the Government when it is stripping people of their potential futures. Just to protect pension funds is not an over-demand. The Government spoke nicely at the press conference that the Government would secure all these things. If the Government really meant it, why is it not in the legislation? Those are the kinds of things we are asking for.

If the Government is sincere about trying to make the best of a bad situation, it would listen to these motions and support them. The New Democrats don't believe in the privatization of Air Canada. We think Canada deserves to have a national carrier. We have been able to have two very competitive national carriers, which has been a good thing. We think there has to be a mixed economy in Canada and we have been very successful in stabilizing the economy by having that kind of mixed economy. The tragedy is the convoluted formula that we have. Whoever dreamt up the idea in the bowels of the bureaucracy that 45 per cent will be privatized, but the remaining 55 per cent will have the same say as the 45 per cent private, that is, one vote. With 25 per cent nationally owned, that means you can have foreign ownership. I do not know who was playing with the computer that day, but obviously it went down when people were trying to figure it out.

It is a tragedy but also an embarrassment for us as Canadians to think that that is the way the Government is playing with our assets and national carriers. If the Government had any respect at all for the country and the image we have in the transport industry, surely it would adopt these amendments to bad legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Is the House ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Question.