

Transportation Accident Investigation Board

I hope the Government understands that although it has moved quickly to take the show away from its opponents in terms of the headlines, that it has left behind an awful wake. It is the responsibility and duty of the Opposition to continue to remind the Government that appearances are not everything and this legislation needs some substance.

Mr. Jack Whittaker (Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt): Madam Speaker, I wish to raise a number of concerns that have been expressed over the last couple of days of debate on this Bill. We on this side of the House are in favour of the thrust of the Bill in principle. However, it is essential that our concerns be re-emphasized for all in the House, particularly for the Minister responsible for the legislation.

The main point to be emphasized is that nothing will have changed with the appointment of this board. The investigation board itself should be totally separate from the Ministry of Transport and from the Minister in charge. If it is not, we will have exactly the same situation we have at the present time. We will have an unworkable system, the system that now exists under the Canadian Aviation Safety Board Act. In that case, people on the board cannot get along with each other. They are coming out with different recommendations based on their investigations.

• (1630)

An example of a problem with this Bill is that the National Energy Board is exempted from this legislation. Yet under this legislation, the National Energy Board regulates the flow of such volatile and flammable materials as gas and oil. If there is an accident with any one of those materials, it will be an accident of major proportions.

As I understand it, the National Energy Board essentially regulates itself. It makes its investigations and appoints from within itself. It appears that the board, as with so many of the other boards that have been set up by this Government and Liberal Governments of the past, does not stand alone. There is, I suggest, a substantial conflict of interest between the members of the board and the Minister in charge.

Again, the same situation will exist under this Bill. Board members will be appointed from lists of Conservative Party hacks, people who are owed favours and people who do not necessarily have any expertise other than taking flights or riding on the rails, as my hon. friend pointed out earlier.

We feel that the appointees to this board should be at arm's length from the Government. They should be people who are not at the beck and call of the Party or of the Minister. They should be people who can investigate and come up with recommendations without fear that they will lose their plum jobs on the investigating board.

It cannot be emphasized enough that we must have a board that stands alone, a board that will never be influenced by those on the other side of the House or by the Minister, a board that can come up with recommendations without fear of repercussion from the Government and without the threat of losing their jobs. I suggest that the committee ensure that there will be independence on any board that will investigate air, rail, marine or commodity pipeline accidents or incidents as stated in the Bill.

Another aspect of this Bill relates to deregulation. This is something that is near and dear to my heart, as it affects my riding of Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt. I see deregulation as being a problem for small communities that are not on the regular rail or air corridors but have spur lines or small air services. In my area, the Canadian Pacific Railway is now in the process of shutting down a line between Spences Bridge and Okanagan Falls, a line, I would suggest, that assisted in opening up the interior of the Province of British Columbia. Because of deregulation in transport and because of competitiveness, the rail company now feels there is no reason to keep the line. It has down-graded the service given to the area to the extent that industries can no longer viably use that transportation service. The final crunch was the closing down of the rail line.

There is a similar situation with small airports in the interior. In the case of Penticton, just two short years ago there was jet air service into that airport. That was changed to Dash-7 and Dash-8 service and there is now a 19-passenger aircraft coming into the area.

This feeds on itself. As the routes become less competitive and less money can be made through deregulation, fewer and fewer people want to go to these places. They want to go where the money is, so the routes are closed down. The Government, looking at these areas, feels that not enough traffic goes into them and will no longer