

Air Canada

The intervention of the Minister was rather remarkable, but not in a very favourable manner. First, the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) said that Air Canada was not for sale. After a few years he decided that that promise was no longer operative and said that they would only sell 45 per cent of it. This Minister has now stood in the House and said that if only 25 per cent is foreign owned it does not mean that it is foreign controlled. If we trust the Prime Minister's word, only 45 per cent is going to be sold. If 25 per cent can be foreign owned, by most people's mathematics five-ninths of the shares that will be offered to the public could be in the hands of a foreign group. The Government itself has set up this arithmetic.

In addition, the Government has said that for the time being the 55 per cent that will remain in the public domain, again if we trust the Prime Minister, will be in a silent partnership, that it will follow the lead of the other 45 per cent.

I realize that the Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn) has never been the Minister of Finance, probably for good reason. Perhaps the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) can get up later this evening and explain why 25 per cent is not a majority of 45 per cent and why that 25 per cent cannot do as it wishes with the shares it has. The problem of the poor Minister of Justice is probably that he has not done very well in math over the years.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: It was my best subject.

Mr. Murphy: That is something I would not admit. The Government is trying to pretend that what it put in the legislation and what it said to the public are not what it put in the legislation and what it said to the public. It is obvious that foreign domination of Air Canada will be possible. The Government has set that up by its very statements. That is very obvious to anyone listening this evening. Why would the Government pretend otherwise? Why would the Minister of Justice try to pretend that that is not what is in the legislation and that that is not the result of the various ministerial statements, including those of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Mazankowski) and the Prime Minister on this very important issue?

We are putting our amendments forward and explaining why they are important to us. We know full well that our amendment provides for the limitation of foreign ownership to 5 per cent. We do not pretend that it says anything else, yet the Government pretends that what it has in the legislation is not there. There is something very sad about that approach.

It is very logical to me that, if the Government means what it says and is going to allow only 45 per cent of the shares to be privatized, as the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister have said, it should say it in the legislation. We believe that the legislation should say what the Government says it means to do.

We find it very ironic that every attempt of the New Democratic Party to put the words of the Government into legislation is refuted by the Government. Is it afraid of its own

words, or does the Government once again not mean what it is saying? Three years ago it was not selling any of Air Canada. Now it is selling only 45 per cent. However, it will not allow that to be put in the legislation because it might be forced to live up to its word.

We are trying to help the Government by putting the words of the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Minister of Transport (Mr. Bouchard) in the legislation. Our position is that we do not want to privatize any of Air Canada. However, we recognize that due to the numbers in this House the Government will eventually get its way on this legislation as it does on most. Therefore, we at least want the safeguard of having in the legislation that which the Government has promised.

We feel the same way with regard to foreign ownership. We have been assured that there will not be foreign control of Air Canada. The Minister of Justice has just used his convoluted math to explain why there will never be foreign control. Yet, the very fact that 25 per cent of the shares would be allowed to go into foreign hands means that there would be effective foreign control. Again, if the Government means what it says, why does the legislation not say that?

The pensioners heard one thing in the 1984 election campaign, and the Minister of Finance broke that word only a few months later in the spring of 1985. One must wonder whether the pensioners would like to see legislation which contains what the Government says. They would have loved to have seen the promise made during the 1984 election campaign that the Conservatives would not deindex the old age pension in legislation. They know that less than nine months later the Minister of Finance, with the support of the Prime Minister, broke that promise.

Earlier tonight we dealt with legislation dealing with the privatization of Eldorado. The workers of that company were told by the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mrs. McDougall), the then Minister responsible for privatization, that they would not lose any of the pension benefits they had before Eldorado was privatized. Only two days ago we received information that that was no longer the case, that the new corporation would not guarantee the pension benefits which workers had prior to the privatization despite the words of the Minister of the Employment and Immigration.

Motion Nos. 2 and 7 standing in the name of the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow) are in amendment to the legislation to privatize Air Canada and do not attempt to do something revolutionary. We are only trying to ensure that the Government lives up to what it said, that there will be no more than 45 per cent privatization and no foreign control of Air Canada. I find it amazing that the Government is afraid to put into legislation the words it has uttered in this House.