

*National Air Policy*

choice of last night to announce some element of national air policy and, the fact that our motion was set down for debate today, just as I would not suggest there was any relationship at all between the fact that the government was condemning the program of restraint, that we had proposed and then began to adopt a pale imitation of it; or, indeed, any relationship at all between the fact that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), standing in this place not long ago, condemned the Kingston conference of myself and various premiers, and then at the first ministers' conference the other day proposed what he had condemned; or indeed any relationship at all between the likely conclusion in the budget to come down next week and, the proposal calling for deductibility of mortgage interest payments. Those are all, of course, simply remarkable coincidences.

We have in this statement of yesterday the latest in a series of quite desperate acts by this government, all leading away from the development of any kind of comprehensive national air policy upon which Canadians can count or upon which the airlines can count. I should say in passing, sir, that this is simply one more act of indifference, to use a mild word in this House; this policy statement was issued outside this House of Commons, instead of here where it should have been issued by the Minister of Transport and Minister of Justice speaking on motions. I know why he did not do that. He chose to go outside the House because he did not want to face questions here in parliament on the policy matter he was revealing. Nonetheless, this is an affront to this House and something which should not be indulged in, and it should not be the continuing practice of this government.

What we have here is not the first air policy of this government that has been brought down in an election atmosphere. I can recall another, as can my colleagues from Winnipeg, all of whom now sit on this side of the House. There were two members after the last election of the other side, but they are no longer there, and that is due in some measure to the fact that there was a promise made and deliberately broken in relation to the establishment of maintenance facilities at the Air Canada hangar there. Indeed, the government promised that the facility would be used for wide bodied aircraft, sir. One wide bodied aircraft showed up in that hangar, and that was on the day it was officially opened. Since then there has been nothing back of any width greater than the credibility gap between what this government says and what it does.

There are various elements I want to address in dealing with this country's air policy today. One element is overriding, and that is that we still have no coherent, long-range national air policy. I would hope that the minister will today at least do the House of Commons the honour of trying to explain his latest pirouette in the name of policy. I would like him to tell us, and I am pleased to see that he is taking note, the detailed nature of the consultations between his ministry and Air Canada before this policy was brought down. I suspect there was none, and unless the minister wants to let that suspicion stand on the record he will have to answer it by telling us precisely the

nature and the detail of consultations with Air Canada relating to a matter which touches Air Canada directly.

We would like to know from the minister today, when he speaks to answer, the nature of the recent conversations between his officials, himself and representatives of Quebecair or of Eastern Provincial Airways, which are most directly affected by one element of the minister's statement in which he talked about the movement "towards the development of a smaller number of strong regional lines than are operating now."

The question we want an answer to is, who is going to absorb whom? What mergers is the government talking about? What has been discussed with the companies proposed to be merged, or is the government simply going to buy them all out—naturally not on a permanent basis, but just for a little while in order to sell them again, which appears to be the minister's program in respect of Nordair?

This government has frequently intruded into almost every other business in the country in the name, of course, of non-intervention—the policy announced by the Prime Minister the other day. It has now become involved in the airline business. I should say to the minister, if I can get his attention, that we would be particularly interested if he would tell us his plans and the plans of the government in regard to Quebecair. We would like to know particularly if it is Quebecair that is the favoured purchaser of all or of part of Nordair and, indeed, if this policy which was created and announced last night is designed for some reason which the House has not seen to serve some interests of Quebecair, or to meet some concerns that the Government of Canada might have in relation to that particular company. I hope the minister will be forthcoming in all of those particular matters.

I want to take in order some of the questions which arise here. First I want to deal with the very novel idea of the Minister of Transport and Minister of Justice, and presumably of his government since he occupies so many of its portfolios, that the best way for the Government of Canada to protect the private sector is for the government to buy an airline that members of the private sector themselves want to buy. The minister knows that Great Lakes, at least, was ready to match the Air Canada bid, and he knows there was at least one other private sector industry in the Hamilton area prepared to buy Nordair. He knows that these offers exist already and he does not have to wait or to shop around for somebody to buy what the government is buying. He knows these offers exist already.

I must say, sir, that only this government could pretend to protect the private sector by bidding against it. The minister says in his release that it is his objective to return Nordair to private ownership within a year. We in this House of Commons have heard that line before, sir.

● (1522)

In 1974 the then minister of industry, trade and commerce, who was I think also in orbit although perhaps not quite as high or as briefly as the present minister, told us that de Havilland and Canadair were being purchased by the govern-