

Supply—Transport

me add this. I will agree with the minister to this extent, that his predecessor did not make quite such a big mess in the Department of Transport as he made at Accra when he went there as Minister of Trade and Commerce.

Mr. Fisher: The hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate has introduced a general criticism of air transport policy, and I would have appreciated a more substantive answer from the minister with regard to the whole question of the actions of this government, and particularly of the minister's predecessor, in opening up a competitive situation concerning the domestic air lines in Canada, with its subsequent catastrophe in terms of air line deficits. Today rather than having one successful national air line and a number of regional carriers, which previously seemed to be doing well, everyone is in the hole. I should like to deal with the words which the minister used last night, when he said:

—the air transport board has made a complete survey of all the regional carrier operations all across Canada starting with the eastern provinces.

What is the purpose of all these regional surveys? The minister says they do not inquire into airports, and by the way I am very pleased to learn that today there are four or five airports making money over and above their operating expenses and depreciation charges. I believe that two years ago there was only one airport doing that.

What is the intention of the air transport board with regard to these surveys? What are they trying to find? For example, are they just examining the present situation in regard to the provision of service to eastern Ontario, to Kingston, and whether it needs a subsidy; or are they trying to get an appreciation of what all these regions need and will need within the next year or two?

If the minister wants to be specific, what about northwestern Ontario? Has there been a survey there? What has the service provided by a United States line from Duluth and Minneapolis into the lakehead, got to do with the situation? Is it included in the survey? Are the surveys taking into account the regional carriers which do not have regular schedules and which are on a chartered basis? Is any appreciation being made of charter services to determine whether they should be encouraged to introduce a schedule service? Are such things being considered in order to develop this situation?

If this is the kind of survey which the air transport board is making, then I wonder how it can move without making some appreciation of terminal facilities and standards at the airports. Wherever one goes in Canada one sees places like Elliot Lake or the town of Atikokan which have not got proper

services at the present time. They want them, but the main difficulty seems to hinge around airport facilities. I believe the minister should give us a more detailed appreciation of how all these regional surveys are dovetailing into the responsibilities of the air transport board. He should also tell us, as the minister who answers for the board, whether he has given any directions or made any requests to that board with regard to these surveys and their purposes. He need not tell me he has not got the authority to do this, because we have seen examples in the past of ministers of the crown holding his particular office giving instructions and asking the air transport board to do certain things. I would like to know whether he has issued any instructions or requests to the air transport board in connection with these regional surveys.

Mr. Balcer: I do not want to take up the time of the committee in describing all the various functions of the air transport board. However, when one considers the manner in which the air transport board proceeds in these general inquiries and in dealing with particular applications, then he will realize that its work has always been done with the utmost care. As hon. members know, representations are made by municipalities, boards of trade, chambers of commerce, industries and other public groups. These bodies make submissions to the air transport board, and the board also publishes advertisements in the newspapers. Anybody who has anything to say on a submission before the board is heard and so I would say that every air service authorized or refused by the air transport board is only authorized or refused after an extremely long and careful study of the matter.

It is also quite logical that the air transport board, before they make any decision authorizing a certain service to a certain community, will make sure that the service to be given that community will have the proper airport facilities for it. The two go together, but it is not the air transport board which decides the kind of airport to be built. This is a decision for the Department of Transport. All the air transport board does is decide on the carriers and on the services to meet the needs of the Canadian people.

In their present general inquiry they have had public hearings all across Canada. They have heard all kinds of representations from interested parties and individuals, and we are quite convinced that by the time this major inquiry has been completed into regional services an inquiry undertaken for the first time in Canada, the board will make recommendations to the government which should have a real, marked effect on the history of Canadian aviation.