

Air Canada

Resources (Mr. Gillespie), might be used as an example of what happens when people take on business operations through their government. Once it was taken on there was no checkmate, no board of directors, no stockholders meetings, no stockholders notification, and no advice whatsoever. How many of those do we need? We have watched the government operate the Canadian National Railways. We have watched the government diversify in all ways which this act would have Air Canada diversify, and it has piled deficit upon deficit. It has also curtailed service upon service. It has made its schedule impossible, as far as conveniencing the people of the Atlantic areas is concerned.

● (1550)

The hon. member may live in Nickel Belt and he may know all about that area, but I suggest he review the history and the services of Canadian National and then examine his own philosophy with great care and see whether it does in fact serve the people it was intended to serve. And the answer is, it does not.

An hon. Member: What is the CPR doing in New Brunswick?

Mr. McCain: All I can tell the hon. member is that many of us have shipped thousands of cars of materials, moved them tens and twenties of miles to get them to the CP for service which the CN could have provided and ought to have provided. The hon. member is putting forward a ridiculous argument.

An hon. Member: No weaknesses in the CP?

Mr. McCain: They have their weaknesses. The weaknesses are multitude. But they still have stockholders who have a voice.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. McCain: If we, as individuals in this House, were to have a voice in the operation of Air Canada or in the reorganization of Air Canada—

Some hon. Members: Agreed!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McCain:—and if its general management were subject to the criticism of this House, and if it would recognize the criticism which comes from members of the House, we would be singing a different tune. But this is not the case. This bill divorces the taxpayers from any ability to influence the corporation. He has not one word to say even through his elected representative. And that is reprehensible legislation.

Mr. Peters: The Liberals can muck up even a good program.

Mr. McCain: I have sat in the House long enough to know that no effective input into the policy or operations of Air Canada has been made by any committee of this House which

[Mr. McCain.]

has sat since October 30, 1972, and according to other members who have been here far longer than I have no one has ever been successful in making an input into Air Canada's operations despite all the notes and memoranda written to the president, to the chairman, or to branch management. Nothing happens.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McCain: If the government would agree to say to the airline, "You will submit your budget to a committee of the House which will have an opportunity to study it and appraise its profitability and assess the service provided by your corporation," we would be talking about a different kettle of fish. But that is not the situation. We are being asked to approve a bill which puts more power in the hands of the minister, a bill which gives still more leeway to the executive, an executive which has proven itself incapable of running a service comparable with that available from other airlines.

I want to give you an example from personal experience of what I mean in terms of the basic procedures by which Crown corporations in general, and Air Canada in particular, operate. It was recently necessary for me to go to Washington. I was not able to make a connection via Air Canada because Air Canada does not bother connecting the Atlantic region continentally with any points except Montreal and Toronto. So I had to go to Presquile and use an American airline. What was my experience? We were grounded at Portland, Maine, by weather conditions, as can happen with any airline. There were two ticket officers at the airport there, side by side. I spoke with the agents of both companies, because of the urgency of my getting to the meeting in Washington. Those two men paged me jointly and separately and kept me posted every ten or 20 minutes until I knew exactly where I was going to be, and at what time, and could let the people at the other end know.

It was not six months ago that I had the misfortune to be out at the airport in the little city of Ottawa, at the disposal of Air Canada. With me was a father, a mother, a 13-month-old child, and a 3-month-old child. Do you know what that airline did at the airport, Mr. Speaker? They would not tell me what the weather was like out of doors. And they took those two little children, together with the father and mother, to Montreal in spite of the promise which was given to them at the airport, and dumped them off in Montreal where they sat for 18 hours on the benches at the airport there. I ask you to compare that kind of treatment which the service I received across the border.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order. It being four o'clock the House will proceed to private members' business.

Mr. McCain: I wish to call it four o'clock, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please.

Mr. McCain: Mr. Speaker, I take it I have been recognized as calling it four o'clock.