

*Routine Proceedings*

Thanks to its national airports policy, the federal government was able to offload the cost of operating regional airports on the communities that depend on those airports. The minister went ahead with his policy without even considering the impact it would have on the cost and availability of regional transportation.

The minister is about to commercialize the air traffic control system by turning it over to a non profit company that is not even representative of all users, since small carriers and regional carriers will not be represented on the board of NavCanada.

• (1015)

I strongly urge the minister to take all necessary steps to protect the interests of small carriers during this privatization exercise. These carriers provide transportation to remote areas that have already paid a very high price for the minister's reforms.

If we consider the international route allocation policy put in place by the minister, it is biased in favour of Canadian Airlines International, which has been given privileged access to booming Asian markets. Air Canada has obtained very limited access to Asian markets. It has no fifth freedom rights and a very reduced flight schedule.

Canadian, however, has gained unlimited access to Air Canada's main foreign market, the United States. And now the minister's policy is sabotaging the development of Montreal's airports by refusing to let Air Canada operate a Montreal—Rome service. The fact that Canadian International has withdrawn its operations from Mirabel must be seen as an indication that the minister's policy for international route allocation has failed.

The Canada Transportation Act is seriously flawed in several respects. It contains no incentives for developing short-line railways. If we want to preserve Canada's railway network, it is essential that short-line railways be able to take over the operation of branch lines from the big railway companies.

When the House reconvenes in February, the Bloc Quebecois will propose several major amendments to this bill, and we hope the minister will have the common sense to support them.

As vice-chairman of the Standing Committee on Transport, I had an opportunity to take part in the proceedings of this committee and of the sub-committee chaired by my colleague for Thunder Bay—Nipigon on the development of a national marine policy. I must say I was surprised and gratified to see that, in developing his marine policy, the minister was strongly influenced by the minority report of the Bloc Quebecois.

In fact, unlike the government members on the committee who only wanted to privatize ports that were in the red, Bloc

Quebecois members favoured commercializing all port facilities, whether they were profitable or not. I therefore welcome the minister's plans in this respect. However, I do wish that in this connection, he would show more concern for the regions than he did when commercializing the airports.

I am also most pleased to learn that the minister has not followed up on the recommendation of the government members of the transport committee to repeal the Pilotage Act. In their minority report, the Bloc members of that committee were against repealing the act, pointing out that the problems between the pilots' associations and the shipowners could be solved through minor amendments to the legislation. The minister seems to share our view, but we shall keep a close eye on the amendments he plans to make to the Pilotage Act.

We had supported the commercialization of the St. Lawrence seaway and are not surprised to find that in the minister's policy. If done intelligently, I believe this will bring renewed life to that important waterway. I hope the minister will make an effort to involve those who work on the Seaway in that process.

In conclusion, I am pleased to see several of the Bloc Quebecois minority report suggestions in the minister's policy. My impression at this time is that the minister is on the right track for providing Quebec and Canada with a forward-looking maritime policy. We must, however, wait and see how he plans to transform his policy into actions.

In light of past experiences, the official opposition will need to remain watchful, and we intend to examine every detail of the minister's measures very carefully. It is already not a good sign that the government is looking at cost recovery for icebreaking in the St. Lawrence. This is unacceptable, for it would mean that Quebec shipowners would be saddled with close to half of all the charges the government intends to levy for coast guard services.

It would be unfair to make shipowners pay for a service that is in the public interest and ensures the safety of those living along the waterway, not to mention the very negative impact this measure would have on the ability of St. Lawrence ports to compete directly with U.S. ports, as they must.

So you see, Mr. Speaker, the important thing is the way we go about it.

• (1020)

[English]

**Mr. Jim Gouk (Kootenay West—Revelstoke, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, it is the Christmas season and a time of goodwill. Therefore I would like to start by wishing the minister a good holiday season. I trust he is still able to hoist some holiday cheer after the strain he put on his arm by patting himself so vigorously on the back.