

Adjournment Debate

It goes on to state:

The Ministry of Transport had been aware of the carrier's non-compliance for some time but had not effectively enforced the provisions of ANO VII, No. 2.

I wonder how many other carriers in Canada are being allowed to operate in this manner? I hope the parliamentary secretary can inform the House what corrective measures the Ministry of Transport has taken since this report was released. The document goes on to state:

The carrier's main base is at Gaspé, Quebec, where it has facilities for dispatch and flight watch. These facilities include weather teletype, telex, telephone and a company radio communications system. The company has an operations manual which had recently been updated and met most of the requirements listed in ANO VII, No. 2. The company procedures in the manual are in French only, and not all company employees, including the pilot of the accident flight, were conversant with that language.

● (2210)

I am sure this aircraft did not come from the Douglas Aircraft Company with technical documents in the French language. The universal language for control towers and so on is the English language. The document states further that in areas of crew training, checking and flight dispatch, the carrier did not operate in accordance with MOT standards. It goes on to state:

Ministry of Transport air carrier base inspection reports, in June 1972 and October 1972, revealed similar operational deficiencies. Flight crew training was irregular and records were scattered, contradictory or non-existent.

In respect of the crew it states that the pilot had not received proper training and checking, before he was assigned as captain, in the following: ground training on the aircraft and on company procedures; flight training on the DC aircraft, and proficiency check. The report then states that the pilot had received his last medical on April 27, 1973, and had failed the colour plate test. It was shown that he was unfit for a commercial licence. I do not understand how this man was able to retain his licence. I hope the parliamentary secretary can explain that this evening. From my preliminary studies I find that MOT inspectors had no authority in the field and that Ottawa must make decisions. This causes long delays. Perhaps this is part of the trouble in respect of this accident.

I also raised the matter of the operation of the control tower and other difficulties before the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence on March 18. At that time Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff, Lieutenant General W. K. Carr, informed me that there are many pilots in northern Quebec who are unilingual French. I find this somewhat amazing. If such a pilot had to make an emergency landing in the United States or in Ontario, where there are no bilingual control tower operators, I do not know what would happen to that plane or that pilot if trouble arose.

Recently Bill C-226 presented by the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax (Mr. Forrestall) passed second reading in the House and is to be referred to the committee. This bill should be brought up in the committee as soon as possible. The purpose of the bill is to establish a permanent and impartial commission of inquiry to investigate transport accidents within federal jurisdiction. It is suggested that many of these transport accidents which perhaps result in loss of life are investigated by the federal

[Mr. McKenzie.]

body. In other words MOT investigates itself, and this is not proper. In other words the accident is investigated by those responsible for making and enforcing the rules under which the transport operated when the accident occurred. There is an obvious conflict of interest in each case. Therefore it is important that this bill be discussed in the committee as soon as possible and that an independent commission be instituted. I believe it was mentioned in the Speech from the Throne at the opening of parliament that such a group would be formed.

A different angle to this matter is brought up in the "Guidelines for Implementation of Air Canada's Corporate Policy on Bilingualism". We find the following statement in this document:

Except in operating and technical communication areas, such as air/ground communications, maintenance flight operations, interline reservations, and other areas where use of languages other than English is prohibited by regulatory authority, the languages of work within the company to be English and French.

So what they are saying here is that for pilots the main language should be English, and that in the control towers only English should be spoken. Here we have a situation where pilots speaking only one language, namely, French, are obtaining licences. There is a great area of conflict here and I hope the parliamentary secretary can give us some explanation of the situation and can tell us what corrective measures will be taken.

Mr. Cliff McIsaac (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, I am sure the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. McKenzie) recognizes full well that the Department of Transport considers investigations of air accidents to be a very serious matter and it has a very competent group of experts working in that general area. I think that the report we are debating here now is a pretty good indication of that fact.

The report of the crash referred to by the hon. member did state that the ministry had not effectively enforced the regulations, and in essence this is an accurate statement. However, by the same token, it does not really indicate the extent to which the ministry had gone in attempting to have the operator comply with the regulations.

In the fall of 1972 our Quebec regional office became aware of irregularities in the operating procedures of Air Gaspé and, as a result, arranged a series of on-site inspections by inspectors from that office. Subsequently it was determined that there had been numerous changes of key operating personnel without notification to the ministry, which was in contravention of the company's operating certificates. As well as frequent inspections of Air Gaspé's operations by the ministry, there were numerous exchanges of correspondence in an attempt to improve what was considered to be a borderline operation.

Improvements were made and operations did improve. However, at the same time unfortunately there was also considerable back-sliding. An alternative to the action taken by the Quebec regional office would have been to suspend operations. Unfortunately, events overtook the efforts of the Quebec inspection staff in that respect, and Air Gaspé was involved in a fatal accident with their DC3 aircraft on May 24, 1974.