

Oral Questions

remind hon. members that, whereas in many other areas of the country freight rate increases are borne in total by those upon whom they are imposed, because of the various programs we have in the Atlantic region a good number of these freight rates are borne to the extent of 50 per cent by the people of Canada through payment of the transportation cost by the government. Therefore, 50 per cent of the increases and, indeed, of the whole rate is very frequently borne by the people of Canada as a whole. I think this is a good thing, because it is part of our commitment to the development of the Atlantic region and I will continue to support that kind of program.

Mr. McCain: Mr. Speaker, the impact is virtually unbearable and beyond the increases which have taken place, particularly as they relate to export rates. The minister overlooks the fact that the Government of Canada, in its wisdom and when it chose, could take steps to alleviate the impact of freight increases; but this it has not done recently. Does the government anticipate, in its policy, that it might take those steps, in a time of economic difficulty in the Atlantic area, in order to reduce the impact of massive increases which have taken place while this minister has been in the saddle but has failed to exercise his capability as minister?

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, I think, again, the notion that costs can somehow simply be ignored, or that they will go away by being transferred to the taxpayer, is a popular notion among opposition politicians. But it is neither true nor is it good for the economy of this country or the taxpayer. It is not sensible for us to transfer to the taxpayer all the freight costs and ignore the realities of those costs. In the Atlantic region, however, we do have a program whereby there is significant assistance to modify that impact, by bearing 50 per cent of certain of those freight costs in the treasury, and I support that program. More than that can only be done if we are willing to put much more in the way of tax dollars into transportation, and thereby lessen the rigour with which all our entrepreneurs have to examine the best way of producing.

An hon. Member: You are lecturing.

Mr. Lang: I am lecturing, the hon. member for Vegreville says. What I am trying to get across is the point that it is often better for us to recognize the real cost of transportation and, where possible, as a result refine the product, process the product and ship a lighter product a further distance, to leave the jobs back at the source, particularly when it is in the Atlantic or the western regions of this country.

GOVERNMENT ACTION TO REDUCE AIRLINE DISASTERS

Mr. Dan McKenzie (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport. It relates to air safety. In May, 1973, there was a fatal crash involving a DC-3, at Rimouski, Quebec, with the loss of four lives. In the MOT accident report it is stated:

The carrier did not comply with the Ministry of Transport standards in pilot training, dispatch, flight watch, and operational control as specified in Air Navigation Order—

[Mr. Lang.]

There was also the crash of a DC-3 last May. In the just released accident report on this incident at Pickle Lake, Ontario, it is stated:

The carrier's maintenance and operational control procedures were below standards specified by Transport Canada.

It would appear there have been no improvements in procedure over the last four years. I ask what measures the minister's department has taken to see that airlines are adhering to MOT standards and that operational control procedures are up to standard?

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should recall that only about a month or six weeks ago I indicated in the House the steps we had taken, following the investigation in northwestern Ontario, to improve the inspection approach throughout the aviation industry. Because I recognized that this was not an isolated matter in relation to western Ontario, we made these improvements right across the country. We have begun the appointment of many more inspectors and have improved their procedures. We have given more authority to the regional offices throughout the country, as was recommended in that investigative report.

Mr. McKenzie: Mr. Speaker, in the Rimouski accident report it is stated:

The Ministry of Transport had been aware of the carrier's non-compliance for some time but had not effectively enforced the provisions—

Also in the report on the crash at Pickle Lake last year, it is stated:

Inspection and enforcement actions by Transport Canada was not effective in correcting the deficiencies of the carrier.

Can the minister give a complete assurance to the House and the travelling public that he will take immediate action to see that carriers comply with MOT provisions, and that the Ministry of Transport will start enforcing and correcting safety regulations relating to Canadian airlines?

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member refers back to the practice of making it appear as though those reports came after the action to which I referred, and they did not; they came before, long before, that action. Action has been taken since that time. I wish the hon. member would not try to mislead the public with regard to that matter. This action is important.

● (1502)

Of course, the prime responsibility for carrying out the regulations rests with the carriers themselves. Most of them are very responsible and very respectable. They are attempting to carry them out in every way they can. Even then, there will be gaps and deficiencies, because human beings are involved and there are bound to be some errors from time to time. Our inspection process is meant to ensure that anyone with bad will or bad intentions is certainly weeded out. Those who have the good will, have the knowledge which leads them to do the job in the right way. We are trying to do that with an extremely able group of transport officials, inspectors and agents