

again in January because of an incident which occurred when I was aboard an aircraft leaving Victoria international airport bound for Vancouver. On a number of occasions since then I have asked what is required to trigger an inquiry into an incident—I put “incident” here in quotation marks—affecting two aircraft in the area.

● (1550)

Perhaps there should be some automatic triggering mechanism which would cause an inquiry to be made. I would have thought that when either a controller or a pilot of an aircraft involved in an incident—and I am sure they all make reports of these incidents which occur during their flights—uses the words “collision”, “near collision”, “possible collision” or “near miss” in his report, and when that report reaches the superintendent of air safety, that would cause an inquiry into that particular incident to be made. I would have thought this inquiry would bring together the visual records and the accounts from the taped flight-deck electronic equipment to determine whether there were means of avoiding a recurrence of incidents of that kind.

Mr. Speaker, you were not with us when we approached Victoria international airport at the end of May. A group of parliamentarians from this House and the other place were on board a service aircraft. As we reached my riding, I felt it would be courteous for me to rise and welcome my colleagues to my riding. I informed them that they did not have to worry, that they would soon be within binocular range of the airport and that we would be brought down safely. There was no problem at all; it was a clear day. However, as soon as I used the word “binocular” in connection with the landing of that aircraft, a prominent member on the government side asked, “Are you suggesting that there is no radar at Victoria international airport? That upset me deeply because there has been correspondence, questions in this House and bills relating to air navigation. I have spoken on the “late show” and I have endeavoured by every conceivable means to bring this lack to the attention of the minister and to have him rectify a situation which I think is inexcusable.

I think it is worth mentioning to the minister, since he is here this afternoon, that there have been other incidents since. If I remember correctly, one occurred during the stay of a Canada-U.S. interparliamentary group in Victoria. The incident occurred over Active Pass. The incident involved a scheduled flight of a float-plane from Victoria harbour to Vancouver harbour. It was a very near miss. I am not suggesting that these flights be directed from the ground. That is not the point of my reiterating this plea. The point is that the pilots who are in the air should be informed of what else is in the air so that they may know what is above them, below them, to one side, crossing their path or otherwise in the general area of their flight.

This particular incident took place when the Canada-U.S. interparliamentary group was meeting in Victoria during the last weekend in May. I understand that the separation was something in the order of 100 feet, which is very close. It is

Aeronautics Act

much too close for comfort. Those who were on board the aircraft were distressed to learn that there was no radar which could have informed the pilot of the aircraft that there was another aircraft in the area. I am informed that the area between Active Pass and Victoria is within the control area of the control tower at Victoria international airport.

It is asking quite a lot to ask the controllers in that tower to cover the 360 degrees around the tower to the depth that is required for the distance from the tower to Active Pass and to identify all aircraft flying in that area in order to notify other aircraft that are approaching or transiting. This is one other matter which is neglected by the minister. I see that he has left the House. Perhaps his officials will make a record of some of these comments. I hope they bring them to the attention of the minister and to the safety committee.

It is not just traffic in and out of Victoria international airport which concerns me. Traffic transiting through the air space above and around that control area, perhaps on its way from Portland or Seattle to Alaska, concerns me as well. I agree that that traffic is generally very high, but incidents could occur which could cause those aircraft to descend into the paths of aircraft which are doing normal scheduled flights, practice flights or sport flights in and out of the Victoria international airport.

Therefore, I appeal once again on the ground of absolute traffic requirements that surveillance radar be placed in Victoria international airport to cover the contingencies which could arise because of transiting traffic in that general area. I am not talking about IFR, I am talking about VFR, and I am aware that it is up to the pilots to avoid problems. It is not up to the controllers to cause separation, under VFR; I know that. That is not the point. However, the pilot should know what else is in the air. He should be informed that there might be an aircraft which has a capacity to fly at a certain rate, travelling on a certain course, at a certain height, and which is likely to be very near the path of another aircraft. These two facts can be taken into account by the pilots, and can avoid collision.

● (1600)

Let us not forget that sometimes our commercial pilots who after long flights are just landing at the Victoria international airport are fatigued, and their reaction might not be as hasty as it should be. I thank them for their speed of reaction on January 21, 1977, when a collision was avoided, and again I ask, if the word “collision” appears in the report—and I can swear that it did—why was there not an inquiry into that incident?

I am not attempting to have IVR control taken over from Vancouver—they do it very effectively—but the fact remains that IVR control in Victoria has had to proceed with the same number of personnel, despite the near doubling of traffic in and out of that airport. I suggest that a surveillance radar, properly positioned and feeding into a screen in the control tower, would provide the missing security link which is needed to give absolute assurance to the controllers and the crews of the aircraft, and of course to the passengers, that is so essential