

SO WHO NEEDS AIRPORTS ?

NOBODY, THAT'S WHO

Unless you are interested in treating the whole thing as just another academic debate, the really important arguments against the retention of the Industrial Airport are contained in the story which appears below.

The story was produced by concerned citizens in Athlone Community, immediately northwest of the Airport, just after the Twin Otter airplane skidded through the playing field of their elementary school a couple of weeks ago.

It is a good news story because it brings out the argument from the point of view of the people who live just a few yards below the flight path of the big airplanes that use the airport. I live in South Edmonton, several hundred yards further from the jets and so I really can't add anything substantial to their first hand accounts of the noise- except to say that I'm sure it drowns out the tinkle of cash registers in the downtown offices that they don't own; or the perpetual fear of crashes - except that it must be nerve wracking not being able to tell until the last minute whether or not the airplane has the necessary few yards of altitude.

In other words, nobody but the people who live under right there can describe in such realistic terms, the syndrome of stupidity that surrounds an airport in the middle of a city.

Writing an anti-airport argument for the University students is really quite a strange thing to be doing. Because university students are in (will be in) precisely that socio-economically advantaged group that gets to use (or own airplanes) and to whom the convenience of having a downtown airport means something.

And that is really the only point of contention from the point of view of a university student, like myself whom history has placed at a comfortable distance from the noise and dangers of airports and the like.

That is, if the Industrial Airport causes any (?) disadvantage, inconvenience, or discomfort, it causes it specifically for that class of Edmontonians that does not benefit from its advantages and conveniences.

The objective circumstances that cause people in Edmonton to argue for or against the retention of the airport are such, in other words, that would seem to dictate that those who produce arguments in favour of its retention should have very little in common with those who oppose it - with one important difference, that those with no reason to identify with the airport are subjected to the same barrage of pro-airport propaganda in the mass media as those whose interests the airport serves.

How does one weigh the arguments when they don't even conflict?

It's as if the question being considered were the retention in Rome of the Coliseum-attending citizenry would quite naturally see the essential arguments as pitting such things as their enjoyment, the place-to-take your wife etc, against such disadvantages as the monotony of the slaughter, the elaborate arrangements necessary and the alternate uses to which the facilities could be put.

The Christians wouldn't see these pros and cons as the important ones and that would make all the difference in the world.

How could a vote be called on the issue? Who would articulate the question?

But, read the story, It was written by somebody who works in the area of the airport and who isn't interested in stupid academic debates.

The danger of having an airport situated in the heart of the city was dramatically emphasized by the crash of the twin engine Otter on Monday September 27.

The plane bumped its way across the Athlone Elementary School yard, crashed through the school yard fence and finally stopped on a lawn ten feet from a house.

To the citizens of Athlone Community the crash was a grim reminder of the daily danger under which they live. The main north west runway of the Edmonton Industrial Airport is south east of their community. Low flying aircraft, including large passenger jets and cargo planes, are hourly occurrences.

While it might seem obvious that such a threat to the safety of Edmontonians should be removed by closing the Industrial and using the International Airport, city council doesn't see it that way. They argue that the \$350,000 annual profit from the airport justifies keeping it open even though it endangers all the people who use the four public schools, three hospitals and the facilities of NAIT in its near vicinity.

In Athlone itself two low income housing developments sheltering 500 families are affected not only by the threat of a crash but by noise pollution of horrendous proportions. Federal Government noise measurements have placed the noise level as high as 120 decibels. According to one resident the noise of a jet revving up before take off "goes right through you". Another person claims that the noise from the airport is threatening the hearing of outdoor workers in the area.

To add insult to injury the Industrial Airport is exempt from the anti-noise by-law. The law is not being enforced against the loudest thing in the city.

CITIZENS PROTEST

Spurred on by the latest crash the citizens of Athlone are taking action. Immediately following the crash of the Otter a group

went to city hall to air their grievances. Treated with an arrogance bordering on contempt the city councils the group was seen by only three of their elected representatives--Kinisky, Dent and Leger. Alderman Ward skirted the issue by raising the specter of women's liberation and told the housewives to burn their bras. The council itself used procedural rigamarole to prevent the issue from being formally raised.

Sobered by Council's arrogance the citizens of Athlone are now planning to take their case to the people of Edmonton in the form of a petition. They need 10% of the voting population, approximately 15,000 signatures to force a plebiscite on the issue.

The airport encompasses an area of 500 acres valued at approximately \$30 million. The interest on this money would be nine times the present airport profit. Developed land would return \$1,250,000 annually in taxes.

Also Edmonton's ambition to become the main supply base for the north would not be threatened by relocating at the International where land for forwarding depots is readily available. In this regard Imperial Oil has already announced that it is shifting its long term base to the International Airport.

No, this isn't an otter either. But it could be a bird carrying Edmonton's nest egg. We all hope it doesn't drop its egg in our front yard, though. And by the way, where do little airplanes come from?

photo Tom Turner



EDMONTON DOES

by Rick Grant

The closure of the Industrial Airport would adversely affect the economy of Edmonton.

If the airport were to close and be moved to some other area, Edmonton would lose several thousand residents, millions of dollars worth of trade and benefits, and millions of dollars worth of indirect benefits provided by smaller businesses dependent upon the trade generated by the companies based directly on air traffic.

There are seventy-nine companies based at the Industrial airport pouring 12,000,000 dollars annually into the Edmonton economy. An estimated 80 additional companies use the airport.

The City of Edmonton receives in excess of \$350,000 a year from the land alone.

I talked with representatives of several companies based at the industrial about their future plans if they were forced to relocate. The consensus was that they would have to move to one of two areas, Calgary, or Leduc and the International Airport.

The Edmonton Flying Club, one of the prime users of the airport is at a loss as to where it would go if the move comes about. The International Airport does not have the facilities to house the club or provide the necessary services to maintain their fleet of aircraft. A move to the International would not solve the present problem of trying to give flying lessons and at the same time staying clear of faster jet aircraft in the airport's vicinity. Small aircraft, flying at slow speeds, can cause serious delays to jet aircraft flying twice as fast in the landing approach.

The argument of several election candidates has been that the airport land could be put to more profitable use as industrial space or as a possible site for an Omniplex.

The fact is, the city has more than enough land at the moment than it can sell. As for Omniplex, the money is not available and the citizens of Edmonton have already expressed their unwillingness to authorize the city to borrow it.

Admittedly, the land could be used to solve the housing crisis but the added residents in the area would not offset the loss of revenues that would result if the airport were closed and the employers forced to move.

Critics of the airport claim that the aircraft using the place produce vast quantities of pollutants and a great deal of noise pollution. These are very valid arguments and ones that the

aircraft industries as a whole are concerned about.

The aircraft manufacturers have been working on reducing the level of pollutants produced by their engines and have in fact started to succeed. The huge engines on the jumbo 747 jets, for example produce less pollution than are produced by the smaller older jets.

The industry as a whole is confident that a solution to noise is in the very near future and sound levels will be reduced to acceptable levels.

The prospect of large aircraft plowing into apartment buildings haunts many people. This situation results from the failure of previous city councils to prohibit construction at the ends of the runways.

However, the damage has been done and the citizens have the right to know the true facts concerning aircraft safety.

1. Aircraft are maintained to incredibly high standards. If a car was inspected and maintained to these standards it would last 300 years.
2. Multi-engine aircraft, 707, DC-8 etc., contrary to belief, are capable of rapid climb on three engines and maintaining height on two, should the others fail.
3. Aircraft such as the 737s that use the industrial, are capable of climbing should one engine fail.
4. Since 1927, there has not been one pilot or civilian death outside of the airport's boundaries as a result of a crash in the city.
5. Automobiles regularly kill more people in one weekend than are killed in one year by all the planes in North America.

Canada's north is on the verge of opening up to development. If the airport were to close then the city would lose an incredible amount of business that could benefit all citizens.

Last year alone the airport shipped 35 million pounds of freight, most of it to the northern communities. This represents a large amount of revenue for the city.

Should the airport close we are going to hear "Calgary, Gateway to the North"

When hundreds of apartments sit empty, the streets crowded with unemployed, thousands of people on welfare and a declining growth rate, is someone going to say it was worth it to close the airport?

What will the city do with a crumbling, empty Omniplex?

Will the huge metropolis of Leduc someday decide to close the International?

And so, as our last remaining 737 wings its way into the quickly setting sun, we say adieu and pack our bags for the last flight to Leduc, Gateway to the North.