

Adjournment Debate

DISASTERS—AIR-INDIA CRASH—REQUEST FOR PUBLIC INQUIRY

Mr. Alan Redway (York East): Madam Speaker, exactly one month ago today, on May 6, I was sitting in my constituency office on O'Connor Drive in Toronto across the desk from two gentlemen, members of the Air-India Survivors Association. One was Dr. Bal Gupta who had lost his wife in that terrible tragedy. The other gentleman had lost not only his wife but all his children as well.

Although we can sympathize with Dr. Gupta and all the Air-India crash survivors, we cannot really feel the depth of their tragedy personally. Hopefully we never will be placed in that position.

The facts of the Air-India disaster speak for themselves. It occurred, as you will recall, Madam Speaker, on June 23, 1985, when Air-India Flight 182 plunged into the sea off the coast of Ireland and 329 men, women, and children lost their lives in that disaster. The vast majority of those men, women, and children were Canadian citizens with origins in India.

● (1745)

Why did those two gentlemen come to my constituency office one month ago? In fact, why is there such a thing as the Air-India Survivors Association? Why do they hold memorial services each year here in Ottawa and Toronto? It is, of course, to remember and honour the loved ones they lost in that great tragedy. At the same time, and understandably so, they want to see the investigation come to an end. They want all the facts to be known. They want justice to be done.

Three years have passed since this happened and, as you know, Madam Speaker, no charges have been laid, no trials held, and no convictions registered. Ireland, where it actually occurred, has had its investigation. India, the proprietor of Air-India, has had its investigation. What about Canada, where the flight departed from? What about Canada, where the vast majority of the victims lived as Canadian citizens? The Solicitor General of Canada (Mr. Kelleher) says that an investigation by the RCMP and CSIS is still active, still ongoing, and is making progress. In fact, some \$60 million has been spent, which the Solicitor General says is more than has ever been spent on any criminal investigation in Canada.

He says that to hold a public judicial inquiry into this great tragedy at this time would hinder the investigation, would divert the investigators away from the investigation, and would cause them to spend time justifying their own actions rather than carrying on the investigation to a conclusion. That may make sense. At first blush it seems to make sense to me, yet I think of the fact that three years have gone by since this investigation got under way. At the same time it has been revealed that tapes of wire-tapped conversations relating to the investigation have been erased. There have been reports of bad blood between the RCMP and CSIS, bad communications between those two organizations. On top of that, we know that the former Director of CSIS, Mr. Finn, left his post and was replaced by Mr. Morden. We know as well that that was not

because things were going right with CSIS. On top of all that, we had a recent report of a mix-up in CSIS and the RCMP in the case of Mr. Mohammad.

With all this going on it is no wonder that the survivors group is upset. It is no wonder that people like Dr. Gupta and others are coming to me and asking questions. It is, in my opinion, time for a public judicial inquiry into this Air-India disaster. It is time to find out once and for all just how active is this investigation that the Solicitor General refers to. How many people are actually involved? Is there anything going on other than routine work? Is there a real investigation going on? What sort of progress has really been made? What do we mean by progress?

At the end of May, the Solicitor General said that he was never going to close the books on this investigation. It is not a question of keeping the books open or closing them. It is a time to look at those books once and for all and to find out what in Heaven's name has been going on.

If he is smart, the Parliamentary Secretary is going to announce to this House and the Canadian public tonight that there will be a public judicial inquiry into the Air-India tragedy.

● (1750)

Mr. Murray Cardiff (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member for York East (Mr. Redway), on February 5, 1988, asked the Government if it were not time for a public inquiry concerning the Air India crash.

The Government shares the concern of Canadians over the progress of the Air India investigation. However, in view of certain actions under way at the moment, a public inquiry would not be appropriate.

The RCMP investigation of the Air India crash, which is still in progress, has been so extensive that there has never been less than 50 RCMP members devoted full time to it since it started. If a public inquiry were to be held while this investigation is in progress, it could interfere with the criminal investigation and would be denied the information that might otherwise have been available from a completed, unimpeded criminal investigation.

In this regard I believe that it would be worth while to point out that this view is also shared by the Security Intelligence Review Committee. I am referring to the testimony given by the chairman of the Security Intelligence Review Committee, the Hon. Ron Atkey, to the Standing Committee on Justice and the Solicitor General during his last appearance before the standing committee on December 17 of last year.

At that time he said:

Our unanimous opinion on this committee, representative of the three Parties in the House of Commons, is that the country's top priority must be to bring the culprits to justice.