

Oral Questions

I would like to say at the outset of this series of questions that I am sure all Canadians were relieved to hear Justice Moshansky say this morning that some of his concerns about aviation safety have been and are being acted upon. However, he also was clear in stating that the Air Ontario crash at Dryden did not just happen, it was allowed to happen, effectively laying at the foot of this government the death of 24 people.

This conclusion is a very serious one to which the government must respond. Will the government, in the face of this conclusion by Mr. Justice Moshansky and the grave consequences of such a fundamental mistake in the government's policy, accept its responsibility? How does the government propose to make retribution for its policy mistake?

Hon. Jean Corbeil (Minister of Transport): First of all, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member for Ottawa South, who was at the press conference this morning, knows that I have indicated that safety in the air in Canada has improved tremendously over the past decade. In 1981 there were 700 aircraft accidents in Canada. In 1991 there were 449 accidents.

We will never be satisfied until we have a zero accident rate, but I think the fact that the situation has improved by 35 per cent over a period of 10 years is an indication that our priority has been on safety.

The report we received this morning is very exhaustive and comprehensive. It contains 191 recommendations. I have indicated that since August of last year I have established an implementation team consisting of 20 persons from Transport Canada and all other segments of the aviation industry to implement these 191 recommendations.

Right now we have already completed 33 of these recommendations. We have indicated that we concur with 61 of the recommendations and action is under way, so already 49 per cent of the 191 recommendations have been implemented. Of the others, the implementation team will start work on them immediately.

• (1420)

I have taken the commitment that I will make public an interim report on the work of that team within the next six months.

[*Translation*]

Mr. John Manley (Ottawa South): Mr. Speaker, according to the inquiry made public this morning, it is clear that the air safety of the Canadian public is not a priority for this government.

I quote the Moshansky report:

The need for increased resources within the Aviation Regulation Directorate to meet the growth and demands expected to be generated by the policy of economic regulatory reform was predicted and well documented in several reports and studies.

Since this government has not acted on the many warnings given to it, would the minister agree to set up an independent task force on air safety, which would report regularly to Parliament on the government's performance in regulating air safety?

[*English*]

Hon. Jean Corbeil (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that in 1984-85 there were 456 inspectors at Transport Canada. In 1991-92 there are 569 inspectors. This indicates, I think, that safety continues to be our prime concern.

I would point out that there were five million movements of aircraft in Canada last year. We had 449 accidents. While we are not complacent, I think this indicates that our record for safety is not diminishing, it is improving and this has been confirmed by the report of the Transportation Safety Board over the past few years.

Mr. John Manley (Ottawa South): Mr. Speaker, the minister really misses the point here. What happened and what Justice Moshansky has reported is that what occurred in the mid-1980s in Canada was a mid-air collision between contradictory federal government policies, that of airline deregulation and deficit reduction.

I quote from the report:

The effect of economic regulatory reform combined with deficit reduction—created a synergy that, in my opinion based on the evidence before this Commission, had an adverse impact on the effective application of safety standards."

Why did the government fail to ensure public safety in the air?

Hon. Jean Corbeil (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I repeat that we received from Justice Moshansky this morning a very comprehensive and thorough report