

*Air Canada*

If welcome to the modern world of privatization and deregulation means seats closer together, planes not maintained to the standard to which we have been accustomed in Canada, flights cancelled at the last minute, flight delays, crew lay-offs, improperly trained crews, no services on the flights, if that is the modern world to which the Parliamentary Secretary refers, then I do not think Canadians would want that modern world. But that is the world that will be created in air transportation if this government Bill gets through.

● (1720)

We have in Canada an outstanding airline service. Why do we have such good service? It is because we have three major airlines, Air Canada, Canadian Airlines International and Wardair. Two of them are private companies. Only Air Canada is a public company. Because Air Canada is a public company, it is regulated by the Government of Canada. It is told to be fair to the travelling public of Canada, and it provides a good service.

It may cost a little more to provide this good service. It may cost a little more to make sure that the maintenance is at the level to which the Government feels Canadians are entitled. At least the former Liberal Government felt that that was the level of maintenance to which Canadians were entitled. It is obvious that this Government does not feel the same way.

If the regulations that are now imposed on Air Canada because it is a public company are taken away, then Air Canada will not only diminish its standards in maintenance, service, employment and training but the other airlines will do so as well. They will then all have a free ticket to reduce service. They will all give equally poor service and will be able to save money. That is what has happened in other countries.

We do not have to imagine what will happen, we need only look at what has happened in other countries to see what it is the Canadian public will have to bear in the years to come if we privatize Air Canada in a deregulated airline industry. The terrible two, privatization and deregulation, will scuttle the ideas, objectives and standards Canadians want to maintain and believe they are entitled to.

The Parliamentary Secretary also referred to the committee doing good work. I have been a Member of Parliament for nine years and I have never been part of such a disgraceful exhibition on the part of the Government as was the case with the legislative committee which studied this particular Bill. We told the witnesses who wanted to be heard that they all had to appear on one day. The people of Canada were restricted to one day to voice their objections to this Bill.

Is this not a transportation Bill? Is it not a Bill dealing with Air Canada? Was Air Canada not brought into being 51 years ago because Canada is a wide, diverse country with people living thousands of miles apart? We thought that only a public airline could provide the level of transportation service to which we felt the Canadian public was entitled. Is this not why Air Canada was brought in? Yet the committee did not travel.

The people in the metropolitan corridors will certainly suffer, but it is the people from the smaller regions of Canada who will really suffer as a result of this privatization, yet the committee did not travel. It did not allow these people to testify before it.

We finished debating the Bill on a Thursday and the committee hearings started on Monday. The hearings were over within eight days and only one day was given for the people of Canada to testify before the committee. If a witness could not be there that one day, that witness could not testify.

This is fine for Members of Parliament. I suppose we were inconvenienced a great deal, but we had second and third reading stages for speeches and we had report stage for amendments. However, the people of Canada had no other opportunity to speak to this regressive legislation than in the legislative committee. The legislative committee provided their one opportunity to speak to Members of Parliament and to testify to how they disagree with this Bill. Yet the Government told the people of Canada from Sydney, from Vancouver Island, and from Cape Breton Island that one day is all they had if they wanted to testify.

Even if we had applications for a large number of witnesses, that did not matter. We pruned the list to the extent that if it had been a tree, all we would have had left was a stump. The leaves, the branches and everything would have gone. The people of Canada were denied their opportunity to speak.

I would like to give an example of the sentiment that exists on this particular issue. Transport 2000 said in a letter to the Chairman of the legislative committee the following:

I am gravely disappointed by the decision of the Legislative Committee on Bill C-129 to schedule only one day to receive and hear witnesses on a subject of national significance: the issue and sale of Air Canada shares. With its distinguished contribution to national development and prominent position in the transportation industry, Air Canada is clearly the most notable crown corporation in the current parliamentary session to be slated for privatization. By selecting witnesses from exclusive airline management, organized labor and academic circles, the Legislative Committee overlooked Air Canada's most important constituency—the travelling public.

Indeed, the legislative committee did overlook the most important source, the Canadian travelling public. Yet it was the Government's decision to hear witnesses on only one day. As a result, Canadians did not have the opportunity to make their presentation.

Why are we here? Why are we debating this Bill? Why do we want to mess around with our airline industry? What is the big need to privatize Air Canada? What will be achieved?

We are allowing some executives and others to increase their salaries, perhaps. We are allowing the private sector to invest in Air Canada. The Bill provides that 75 per cent of the shares to be purchased have to be purchased by Canadians since only 25 per cent of the shares can be held by non-residents. Is that what we are trying to achieve? No, it cannot possibly be because Canadians already own Air Canada. Canadians from coast to coast own Air Canada. We are not giving shares of Air Canada to the public because the public already owns it.