

Air Canada

I am a great comparison shopper. I am pleased and proud to say that Air Canada competes with the finest airlines in the world. There is no question about it. The quality of service, the staff, the attitude and the leadership in aviation shown by Air Canada are all unquestioned. Thus I am standing with a great deal of confidence in knowing that the management of Air Canada is perfectly capable of competing in the world, in the private sector, in the air transportation business. I believe that management is extremely pleased with this decision as well.

At one time Air Canada served a public policy purpose in Canada. I believe that Canada is one of the toughest countries in the world to govern because of the vast distances between centres of population and because of its vast size. Thus transportation is very important. As the airline industry grew, various airlines in this country grew and matured. At the beginning we had to ensure that good, safe, and competent services were provided for all areas and regions of the country. In the beginning, and for a number of years, Air Canada was the tool that we used to achieve that.

● (1230)

Today the industry has matured tremendously. We as Canadians can be very proud of the various airlines that we have, and Air Canada is one of those. It is time that Air Canada competed on an equal basis with the other airlines in Canada that have developed and matured over the years. Because of the maturity of the organization, the public policy purpose for Air Canada no longer exists. Needless to say, I am very pleased to participate in this debate and support the Bill wholeheartedly.

There is not only great support from the staff of Air Canada, but generally I believe the public is supporting this move. Simply stated, the privatization program of the Government of Canada is if it does not serve a public policy purpose, then it should not be in government hands.

The success stories of those companies that have been privatized are nothing short of spectacular. De Havilland is one such example. For the period of time we debated in the House the privatization of de Havilland, we heard the Liberal Member who represents that area say how disastrous that it was going to be. He stood out in front of the plant and handed out pamphlets that stated that this was the demise of the company, it was going to be terrible, and what a terrible fate was ahead for the group of workers at de Havilland.

As it turned out, I believe there are 1,200 to 1,500 more employees at that plant. The plant has been modernized and streamlined. A few days ago I met with the president and he was excited and enthusiastic about what is going on. They are designing a much larger Dash-8, their sales are tremendous, and the prospects for the future are great. One can look at some 14 other privatizations that have taken place. They are all success stories. I have no doubt whatsoever that Air Canada will also be a success story.

We want to get this debate into committee in order that the committee can examine how the privatization will be carried out, hear representations from the public on their thoughts. Because this is such an important item and because the Government places such a priority on it, and because the Opposition is not very enthusiastic in its opposition, if the truth were known, I think that the Opposition would support this wholeheartedly, especially my friends in the New Democratic Party. If they talked to those ordinary Canadians whom they are always preaching about over there, if they talked to the people who handle the baggage, who take the reservations, the air crew, pilots, and so on, they would find out that the staff is very much in favour of this and looking forward to actively participating in the operation and the share ownership of that company. Because it is so wanted throughout the country, not only by staff but also by the general public, I move:

That the question be now put.

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): Mr. McDermid seconded by Mr. James moves that the question be now put. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): On debate, the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Keeper).

Mr. Cyril Keeper (Winnipeg North Centre): Madam Speaker, my colleague wishes to know if I need a minute or two to finish my lunch. I do not feel the least bit embarrassed about that. I am willing to give up my lunch if we can put the brakes on the Government when it comes to the selling out of Air Canada.

Mrs. Sparrow: It is not selling it out.

Mr. Keeper: I hear a little protest over there. I hope that means that the Government will pay close attention to what I have to say, because there are some very important issues that have to be faced in this privatization of Air Canada.

The Hon. Member who has just spoken stated that there was no longer a public policy purpose to having Air Canada owned by Canadians, owned by the public sector, and while it was useful and nice to have Air Canada in the public sector when it was being established and growing that now it is a mature airline, poof, the public policy purpose for having Air Canada has disappeared.

The fundamental question is whether there is a public purpose for having a publicly owned Air Canada or, as the Hon. Member has stated, whether the primary concern has to be with the fairness of the competition between Air Canada and the other airlines in the country. The Hon. Member emphasized the point that now that Air Canada is mature it is time to ensure that Air Canada is competing on a fair basis