

Ministerial Responsibility

interested parties and always give overriding priority to the safety of air travellers and air crew.

In September of last year a committee representative of CALPA, pilots, controllers, machinists, the airline industry, and the province of Quebec was set up to study bilingualism in air traffic control. It recommended that the use of French remain limited to visual flight rule operations, yet on December 31, 1975, despite all these studies, the Minister of Transport suddenly announced that bilingual air traffic control would be extended to all elements of air traffic control in Quebec. This was in spite of recommendations not only from the air traffic controllers but from the airline pilots, the machinists, the government of Quebec, and the airline companies. Disregarding this advice, the minister says bilingualism will be extended to all elements of air traffic control in Quebec, with an extension of visual flight rules to two more airports in the summer of 1976 and an eventual extension to instrument flight rules when safe procedures are developed. The minister made that announcement even though some of his own press announcements had led one to expect something different.

All parties in this House have supported bilingualism. There is no argument about that. Again we are in a situation where the minister either evades, or misuses, or abuses the responsibility which belongs to him. There can be no question about this: if it is intended to add a duty to an air traffic controller, whether that additional duty involves another language, or new instruments, or polishing his supervisor's shoes, it will increase the controller's work load, it will increase the stress upon that person, and this may be reflected in his ability to carry out his job with the maximum effectiveness and safety. This is perfectly logical. It is saying nothing against one language or another.

Surely the Minister of Transport could have met with the controllers, if necessary on a daily basis, to let them know that the resignation of Mr. Keenan was regretted not only by their organization but by himself—to let them know he would try to get another commissioner appointed as soon as possible. He might have taken them into his confidence, discussed the subject with them and reassured them that in the end the controllers, the pilots, and the companies, though the process might take somewhat longer, would have a full and definite part to play in developing an acceptable system. He might have done all this instead of making an arbitrary announcement which flies in the face of the recommendations of a committee of his own department. That is not carrying out ministerial responsibility.

● (2120)

Instead of that what did the minister do last week? He went to Paris. Why did he go to Paris? He went to check on bilingual air traffic control at the airports in Paris and in other countries in Europe. I could have saved him the trouble. There were eight members of this House who made a trip on April 13 and 14. I was privileged to be invited to the flight deck by the captain of that Air Canada aircraft, and I listened to the air traffic controller in Paris for the last two hours of the flight. I could have saved the minister the trouble. I could have told him it was working very well there. The same situation exists in Brussels. But the minister went to Paris to investigate.

[Mr. Benjamin.]

The terms of reference for the commission of inquiry into bilingualism in respect of air traffic control are limited, as reported in the *Globe and Mail* of Monday, June 21. The article states that the commission is vested with the power to inquire only into methods of introducing bilingualism but it cannot inquire into the policy of whether it is safe to introduce bilingualism at all.

The minister went to Paris to check on bilingualism in air traffic control, but I should have thought that would be the job of the commission of inquiry. I should have thought that the commissioner would go to Paris, London, Brussels, The Hague, Rome, Berlin, and anywhere else necessary. The minister went, and in the meantime the whole country was shut down. Is that carrying out ministerial responsibility or is that some more of the shifty, shifting operations of that minister and, I am sorry to say, some others in the government?

I fully support the motion of want of confidence because I am convinced there has been too much of this shifting of responsibility. There has been too much evasion of responsibility, with the using of public bodies and public servants to take the political heat off or to get a tough decision implemented. Whether members of this House agree or disagree with a particular policy taken by the government is not the point. The point is that the government resorts to the use of public bodies and public servants to shift political heat and political blame. It seems to me ministers are working at abdicating their own responsibility.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member but his allotted time has expired.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre De Bané (Matane): Mr. Speaker, the last words on the bilingualism issue in air communications show to what extent some members opposite can be hypocrites when it suits their purpose.

Indeed, unless I am mistaken the discussion today was to show our confidence in the public service. However, the case which has just been raised by the member for Regina Lake Centre (Mr. Benjamin) shows how principles give way to prejudices. Let us take for example bilingualism in air control.

[English]

Let us take the precise example of bilingualism in air traffic control if we really believe in the competence of civil servants. Every single aircraft in this country flies according to rules devised by officials of the Department of Transport headed by Mr. McLeish. These rules are considered all around the world to be the most strict and safest. Now that these experts who devise rules concerning flying say that they can devise rules to permit bilingualism in the province of Quebec, what is the reaction of the hon. member for Regina-Lake Centre? He does not have confidence in them any more even though their record is flawless, and even though they have a world renowned reputation concerning safety. Now hon. members attack their reputation.

Mr. Benjamin: No, I attack the minister.

Mr. De Bané: No, Sir, do not try to misconstrue the situation we are in today. Knowing that these civil servants have an absolutely perfect reputation and record in