

Air Canada

ownership. That does not mean that collectively they want Air Canada to be privatized.

I have the brief submitted from the Canadian Automobile Workers representing some 3,200 employees. They note that Air Canada has already been trying to replace \$14 an hour Air Canada employees having 20 years service with brand new \$6 an hour employees for its non-unionized regional carriers. Many of the CAW employees are ticket agents and most of them work at reservation offices in airports and communities across Canada. These people are good, efficient, and part of the very fine service that we have come to expect from Air Canada, 75 per cent of whom are women. The contract they have has no provisions for job security and there are no provisions for job security in this Bill. They are worried that Air Canada has plans for base closure but as long as Air Canada is a public airline, and in danger of public outcry, it would back off. If Air Canada is privatized, they suspect that many of these bases will have reduced levels of service. As well there is the prospect of unstable schedules and loss of income to the community.

The machinists union representing some 7,000 or 8,000 workers, 8,500 in maintenance, ground service and accounting are also categorically opposed to this move. They found it particularly repugnant that Air Canada's senior management has been running a million dollar campaign to convince its employees, the members of the union, of the dubious merits of privatizing Air Canada. For all the money and effort Air Canada is expending, all it can offer its workers are big promises and equivocal denials.

The third union is the Canadian Union of Public Employees. CUPE represents some 3,500 flight attendants at Air Canada. They will be affected if Air Canada decides to close the flight attendant bases. They say that they stand opposed to Bill C-129 and its underlying philosophy and say that it is bad legislation and bad policy.

On behalf of those three unions, Mr. Speaker, I am not sure how unequivocal or how much more definite they can get. For members of the Government to say the employees want that is simply not the case. With respect to job security, which is the issue addressed in one of the two amendments we are debating right now, CUPE points out that while some maintenance bases are guaranteed, there is no guarantee of the volume of work or the number of jobs at the maintenance centres. A private board of directors is in no way restrained by Bill C-129 if it decides to transfer large numbers of employees from its Montreal or Winnipeg bases to Toronto. This is inevitable as Air Canada decides to buy aircraft of a completely new generation from a different manufacturer.

[Translation]

In other words, Mr. Speaker, it is even possible that half of the Montreal maintenance base will be shut down and that the work will be transferred to the Mississauga base close to the Pearson Airport in Toronto.

[English]

For flight attendants, there are no guarantees in the legislation for any of our bases. As one New York based investment analyst has said, it is only a matter of time: "Eventually Air Canada will have to address the question: Does it need as many employees as it has?"

Just as has happened with British Airways, Air Canada employees who run a good, efficient airline, a profitable airline and a competitive airline are saying: "What is going to happen?" We will get American style airline management coming in, bottom-line management, cut, chop, slash maintenance bases stripped of everything except their name possibly in Winnipeg and in Toronto, flight attendant bases being shut down and the level of service being degraded overwhelmingly. The Americans, 10 years after doing it in the United States, are saying that their service is worse. People are fed up with the delays and the quality of service which is much less. The same thing is likely to happen here.

When the unions oppose this deal, when they seek guarantees on behalf of their employees they are trying to maintain a quality of service to which Canadians have become used. Anyone coming back from the United States knows what a pleasure it is to return here and what a pleasure it is to have the standards of quality and service that we have on Canada's airlines, both public and private. People know that is something worth valuing rather than something to be thrown away the way the Government is doing.

● (1050)

I very much hope that these amendments which are designed to preserve not just job security but quality of service for the passengers of Air Canada will attract the support of members of all Parties.

Mr. Russell MacLellan (Cape Breton—The Sydneys): Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak in support of these two motions. This is our chance in the House of Commons and in the country to safeguard a great many of the employees of Air Canada who quite possibly will be losing their jobs in great numbers if privatization goes ahead. That point has been made with respect to the maintenance base in the city of Winnipeg. It is mentioned in the Bill that this base will be maintained. However, I think it has to be accentuated that this base not only has to be maintained but maintained in its present strength, and that there should not be just a corporal's guard of employees in the city of Winnipeg in this facility. That has to be made known to the Government. It has to be emphasized. As Canadians we must have the assurance that this will take place.

Also in the city of Winnipeg is a very valuable and very smooth operating financial centre which is not guaranteed in this Bill and which should be guaranteed in it. The people of Winnipeg and western Canada have the right to expect that that financial centre will remain in the City of Winnipeg.