

When we were over there we heard about privatization, something that is dealt with in our report in the first place. We heard about privatizing airline companies and even air terminals.

In each case, it should be noted that the Government always retained the right to step in, or if you prefer to get out, and kept a preferential share that gave it a right above all other shares. I think in Canada we should keep that approach in mind if we ever consider privatizing some of our Crown Corporations.

We also heard about the free port concept. In particular, some air terminals were designated free ports, and in one case only out of six, one air terminal met with some success. This is a recommendation we made our report, Mirabel being possibly designated a free port. Certainly this is something that should be considered.

As the Hon. Parliamentary Secretary said earlier, we made 13 recommendations, and the Government stated it had already accepted around ten. I am pleased with that, but I would still like to see the Government take much faster action not only in accepting those recommendations but in taking action. When we were over there, Mr. Speaker, we heard about safety and security on the ground and in the air, in baggage inspection, and in every aspect of air transport. This is one of the most important recommendations in our report, at least in my view.

We were told about ground security, and I think we could consider that when we take a look at the way we operate our security program in this country.

Speaking of ground security, I imagine the House will recall the incident that occurred recently at the airport here in Ottawa when they had a bomb scare, and we saw how our system operates. In fact, we saw it did not work as far as ground security is concerned, because no one knew what to do. Mr. Speaker, you probably saw some clips on television, where airline ticket agents left their posts to go to a safe area. The public, the people who were standing in line to get their tickets, simply stayed put without being warned about what was going on.

RCMP officers on the premises were asked what was happening and they answered: Well we don't know, all we know is we have our orders.

I mentioned this incident, Mr. Speaker, to draw the attention of the House to the deficiencies in our security system. Imagine if the bomb scare had been real! Many people might have been hurt and even have lost their lives, and it was lucky the scare was a hoax.

We also talked about air safety. In Europe—at least that is what we were told—they don't have the same problem we have in North America with near misses, but I think we should discuss this problem.

Motions

In the report by the Canadian Aviation Safety Board, it says that in Canada, accidents due to lack of spacing have increased by 100 per cent, and that is a serious matter. This means that planes are flying too close together, which could be disastrous.

When we asked the Minister about this situation, he said there was no cause for alarm. However, Mr. Speaker, we now have 200 fewer air traffic controllers than we had two years ago. The Government says it is going to hire 250 controllers, but the Government will have to hurry up so it can assure Canadians they are perfectly safe in the air.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to get back to the subject of ground security, when they check passengers and baggage. We asked the Minister several times whether he was going to do something and whether he was aware of the problem. Of course, the Minister kept saying there was no problem, that everything was okay, and that people were perfectly safe. We have the best system. In fact, the Parliamentary Secretary told us earlier about various steps that had been taken by the Minister, and I could read from the same press release.

• (1320)

[English]

The press release of December 1 states that the Minister of Transport (Mr. Crosbie) dismissed as totally untrue the statement on CBC that tighter security measures following the Air-India crash two and a half years ago had been relaxed.

He went on to enumerate a few security measures which had been improved upon. Additional x-ray detection equipment and newly developed explosive vapour detectors were put into service and acquisition of additional equipment was accelerated.

[Translation]

The only thing wrong with these machines, Mr. Speaker, is that they cannot operate on their own. They absolutely need operators who know how to handle them and who understand what they can do. As recently as last week, we watched a television program devoted to the inspection system. Although we had directed several questions to the Minister to make sure that he was dealing with this problem, he had insisted that no such problem existed. Now, thanks to a television reporting crew which visited our airports, we know just how the system works.

Let us go back to my X-ray machine. Some have been bought and others are being installed. But I wish to zero in on the machine operator. When interviewed, Mr. Speaker, the young man stated that having applied for a job, he had received a few hours training viewing a video. Immediately afterwards he was put in charge of security checking passengers before boarding planes to make absolutely sure they did not carry any weapon, bomb or detonating device which could jeopardize the security of other passengers.