

Oral Questions

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, my hon. friend mentioned so many events that I do not know with respect to which one he wants me to tell when I was involved. If it is the Dart decision, I was informed the same day that everybody else was, as he was. This is the situation.

This morning I had a very useful conversation with Premier Buchanan on this subject. We agreed to meet next week to look at all aspects of this case, that is, the freight rates, the CN investment in Cast, the National Harbours Board port charges and, the ice-breaking activities of my department. We will meet on Tuesday, I think, when he and I and our officials will look at every aspect of the matter so that we will at least have the facts on which to comment. Sometimes it is useful to have all the facts.

Mr. Crosby: Madam Speaker, I will take the minister at his word when he says that he did not know in advance about this. I will say to him, however, that he should check with his officials at Canadian National Railways because they knew of the impending action many months ago when the Dart Containerline Service officials consulted with them, asked these questions, and put this problem to them.

I want to know what the minister is prepared to do now by way of equalizing the treatment of the port of Halifax and the port of Montreal, bearing in mind that the Government of Canada, according to Dart Containerline officials, spends \$20 million on clearing the St. Lawrence River for the benefit of the port of Montreal and spends no such amount of money for the benefit of the port of Halifax.

Mr. Pepin: Madam Speaker, my hon. friend has just repeated in his second question the elements that I said the Premier of Nova Scotia and I would discuss. The least he can do is to suspend his judgment for a few days. I presume that at the end of that meeting we will issue a communiqué of some kind to establish what are the facts.

Of course, I was in touch with CN as soon as I heard the news about Dart. The president of CN assured me that he had been assured repeatedly by the participants in this movement that the rates for freight were not a cause of the decision that was taken by Dart. Similarly, the National Harbours Board chairman, to whom I speak almost every day, has assured me that the charges in the port of Halifax are lower than those in the port of Montreal. We are trying to establish all these facts and I will present them to my hon. friend after the meeting with Premier Buchanan.

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PUBLIC SERVICE**DESIGNATION OF AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS AS ESSENTIAL WORKERS**

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Madam Speaker, my question is for the President of the Treasury Board. It arises out of Treasury Board's proposal to designate Canada's air

traffic controllers. Can the minister explain to the House why Treasury Board chose to ignore the warnings of a six-member Transport Canada committee which stated that designation of all of Canada's air traffic controllers would seriously impair and jeopardize Canada's air traffic services?

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, all matters were taken into account at the time the decision was made to seek designation of, I believe, between 1,700 and 1,800, air traffic controllers. That matter is still pending. I do not think the decision was taken without full knowledge of the facts and without due regard to all considerations, particularly the safety of the public.

● (1450)

IMPACT ON SAFETY OF TRAVELLING PUBLIC

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Madam Speaker, may I ask the Minister of Transport why he chose to ignore the warnings of his departmental officials on this very important matter inasmuch as the President of the Treasury Board stated in a letter to the president of the Air Traffic Controllers Association that the Minister of Transport has endorsed the position taken by the President of the Treasury Board? It would appear that the actions of the Minister of Transport are clearly not in keeping with the objective of providing safety and security to Canada's air travelling public.

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): In order to answer the question, Madam Speaker, we should have the complete document before us so that we can analyse it line by line. The document states that safety would be endangered if we followed a certain course of action because the union people would be angry, not because the system would be inadequate. I am sorry I cannot go into the details, but I will be happy to look at the document that I have received. As the President of the Treasury Board said, the decision was based on a number of factors, and that was one among many.

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Hon. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Madam Speaker, the Minister of Transport is responsible for the safety and security of air traffic services. Given the statements made by his officials, the six-member committee, surely that must cause some anxiety and apprehension in the mind of the minister. If not, it certainly should.

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): I quite agree, Madam Speaker. The decision was not an easy one to make. There were four options. One was to operate a limited system. That, of course, offered quite a lot of security but also disadvantages in terms of the economics of the country. Another one was to designate the 1,700 controllers. That involved safety factors, which we examined. It is not that long ago since the hon. member was minister of transport, and I am sure he remembers how difficult these decisions are, how balanced they must be.