

Government Orders

We in the Reform Party are not asking for a costly and time consuming royal commission to deliver a report long after the cause for inquiry has been forgotten.

What we do ask is that the Standing Committee on Transport be allowed to exercise its power to subpoena witnesses from the government and private sector. The Liberals promised both open government and greater power for committees. Let us have a few weeks of hearings, find out why the government is determined under section 10(1) of its bill to hand out compensation. Let us turn over a few rocks and see if there is anything underneath them.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today on Bill C-22 which provides for the cancellation of a contract. The Bloc Québécois is, I believe, putting the lobbying process on trial. Several of my colleagues raised this matter during their presentations. The government side is beginning to label us as wafflers or quibblers, but what we are doing in fact is seizing the opportunity to discuss thoroughly a matter which the government only seemed to want to deal with superficially.

I think the government was in for quite a surprise because even though ultimately we would like a royal commission of inquiry to be appointed, this serious debate has allowed us to discuss some very important issues in the House, issues which the government may have preferred to keep under wraps. I want to take the opportunity today to recall the argument I presented last week and take it a little further. Among other things, I drew an analogy between the different airports as far as airport authorities are concerned and I would like to touch on this matter a little further today.

Basically, there have been three types of airport management since 1987. The then minister, Mr. Mazankowski, introduced deregulation and opened the door to the possibility of communities taking over the management of their local airport. Mr. Mazankowski indicated at the time that the administration of 200 airports in Canada could be retroceded to various communities. Thus, interested communities could take over in a reasonable way the administration of their airport.

Of course, prior to 1987, Transport Canada was responsible for all airport administration, with all of the inconveniences this entailed. I recall that when I began sitting on the Montreal Airports Advisory Board, a position which I held for five years, preparations were being made to negotiate with Transport Canada. The history of airport management in Montreal was already being reviewed, along with the cumbersome nature of

Transport Canada's administration and its way of handling all changes. We had to contend with a great deal of bureaucracy and it took months to make any headway at all on specific issues.

Naturally, the Montreal region opted for a local airport authority to administer its airport facilities. At that time, we had already gone beyond the great dream of making Montreal the hub for air traffic, which the Liberals had promised when Mirabel was built. The promise then was that Montreal would become the hub for America and Canada.

Unfortunately, with the changes in technology, airplanes perform much better now than they did then, so they no longer have to land in Montreal. We saw that planes went directly to Toronto and the private sector in Toronto realized that pretty well too. That is why Ottawa has always favoured Toronto, Transport Canada favoured Toronto, and we soon lost our position as a hub. We saw that for all major activity slots in Toronto, if we tried to land in Toronto from Montreal—I am talking to you about Michel Leblanc with Inter—Inter, which had broken away from InterCanadian, was offered landing slots that made the survival of a well-managed company impossible. The expected happened: Inter went bankrupt.

We see that when power was left with Transport Canada, it was abused and Toronto benefited compared to Montreal. So when the policy took effect in 1987 and we had the chance to manage our own airports for the future, the greater Montreal area seized this opportunity. They formed a board of directors with an executive that was very representative of the region. The north shore, the south shore and the island of Montreal took charge and decided that they would negotiate the transfer of this airport with the federal government. Remember that the question of having two airports also arose then. The government was pondering whether to close Mirabel or Dorval. Here again is another case where we had very little say in the matter when power was centralized in Ottawa.

• (1125)

In other words, overnight, the federal government could have decided to close Mirabel because it was no longer used enough and to concentrate all the traffic in Dorval, or vice versa. That was extremely dangerous for us.

One of the first things that the Montreal airports authority did was to thoroughly examine this issue of having two airports in the Montreal region. An international panel helped us to see the very great potential of two airports; it is like having one airport with two terminals. The international panel told us that it was wonderful and that we should take advantage of it. Of course, since the Montreal airports authority now holds the cards, it has developed an action plan and a business plan to promote the airports. Finally, we also have our say on landing rights and we