

Transport Commission of Inquiry

In this regard I am advised that even before the study to review the possibility or advisability of creating some type of independent accident investigating board the air administration was already considering a proposal to set up an accident review board which would consist chiefly of persons other than Department of Transport officials. This development need not await legislation.

As I stated earlier in my remarks, I am not at this time unalterably opposed to the principle embodied in Bill C-109. In fact, I support the principle. On the other hand, I am not sufficiently in favour of the bill to support it. The principle being advanced is in fact a very good one, but I think it is desirable, before proceeding with such a measure, to have available and to give full and adequate consideration to an analysis of all the factors involved. Because whatever body we set up will be of a permanent nature. This process is now taking place and some type of proposal, similar in principle to this bill, should be forthcoming without too much delay.

Mr. Dan McKenzie (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I would like to compliment the parliamentary secretary on his remarks, but I would also like to point out that many of the matters he brought up would be better discussed in committee. With respect to finding qualified people for an independent inquiry board, we could arrange interviews and we might even import people from other countries.

I have been quite anxious for some time to speak on this important bill presented by my colleague, the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrestall). Bill C-109 would provide for the formation of a federal transportation committee of inquiry to investigate transport accidents. Such an impartial committee has long been needed in Canada and would be especially valuable right now in view of the many problems created by this government's disastrous transportation policies. The Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) has admitted that transportation in this country is in a state of chaos and has promised many changes and a vast re-organization of his department. When this will come about is anyone's guess, but personally I am not optimistic.

My scepticism regarding the government's intention to revamp and revitalize transportation in this country is based upon my own experience with the Department of Transport over the past 18 months. During this time I have done virtually everything I can in an effort to alert the minister to the many serious problems involving Air Canada, especially at Dorval where the air maintenance base is located.

I have repeatedly called for a full scale investigation into the Dorval operation. I have written letters to the minister and to the president of Air Canada. I have spoken to the press and have held a press conference. I have spoken numerous times in this House, and I have travelled to Dorval and reviewed the situation with the employees there, with many of whom I am in constant touch. Yet to my knowledge none of my charges concerning the problems with Air Canada at Dorval have been investigated, and if by chance they have, the investigation has been conducted intra departmentally and in secrecy.

[Mr. Guay (St. Boniface).]

My colleague is correct when he asserts that there is a serious conflict of interest here. Even though Air Canada is a Crown corporation, it is still a case of the Department of Transport or Air Canada investigating itself. Thus, there is a very real need for an independent federal transport committee of inquiry to investigate any and all accidents relating to transportation in Canada. Such a committee could also investigate certain charges and allegations made by individuals and unions concerning the safety of our transportation modes. Only through an independent body such as this could the people of Canada be guaranteed proper and credible investigation into transportation accidents in Canada.

I am positive that such an impartial committee would, upon investigating the deteriorating Air Canada situation at Dorval, discover that the problems there relate directly to air line safety. These problems include overstaffing in some departments and understaffing in others. While overstaffing results in extra costs through duplication, understaffing often results in failure to comply with MOT regulations. This fact has serious implications in regard to safety. Then in addition outdated systems which are responsible for much inefficiency are in widespread use; equipment is not performing properly, attributable to poor servicing; basic training in rules etc. for employees is poor, and many are unaware of MOT standards, requirements and general procedures; and little effort is made by officials to obtain MOT required manuals or old out of date manuals which would acquaint and familiarize employees with particular subjects.

This brief list is far from exhaustive. There are numerous other instances of incompetency and inefficiency. The alarming fact, however, is, as I mentioned, the possible safety hazards incidental to such an arrangement.

Generally, this is the situation at Dorval today, a situation which I have endeavoured to bring to the minister's attention. I should also point out that I have not been alone in the effort to acquaint the Department of Transport and Air Canada with the current state of affairs. Many individual employees and several unions and associations, the most notable being the Canadian Air Line Employees Association, have also tried to draw attention to what they see as a dangerous situation with regard to safety. For example, a recent bulletin of the regional shop committee customer service at Dorval stated that, because first level Air Canada supervisors are concerned only with running a schedule operation, they are, like other Air Canada employees, forced to discuss problems at the second level of management. One problem these men would like to discuss is safety. Their collective agreement clearly specifies that management is responsible for initiating and monitoring all practices necessary to ensure the safety and health of employees as well as the safety of all equipment. But the regional shop committee at Dorval has had to deal with second level management and supervise many safety policies themselves.

As well there is the September, 1973 letter, sent to Mr. R. J. Thatcher, director of maintenance quality at Dorval, from eight inspectors. The letter is a critical one, presented by the men with the aim of achieving a much more effective inspection program at Dorval's unit and support shops. It contains an exhaustive list of areas where radical