

Supply

Let me point out that I did not for one moment suggest that all the complaints which go into the Government are from Conservatives. I am suggesting that this one was, quite clearly, because it was admitted to have been. But the problem is that not all complaints breach the fundamental rights of other people. Not all complaints touch upon whether or not the right to freedom of speech is being violated.

What has to be done is that this Ministry, and all others, have to be sensitized to clearly understand that when complaints which clearly touch upon the right to freedom of speech come in, they cannot be left simply to the whim of the individual corporation or Crown agency to make a determination as to how to deal with them. If one was going to deal with this kind of complaint fairly, what ought to have been done, if some action was needed, was to send a letter to Air Canada pointing out first that a complaint was made, and second, that under the Charter its employees have the right to freedom of speech, and third, that under the operating instructions of Air Canada there is no prohibition to exercising that right and, therefore, how in the normal course of events one should respond to this particular complaint.

It is a different matter from having arrived to catch a flight and finding the door locked and the flight gone ahead of time. That kind of complaint is quite different. If one did not like the quality of food served it would be a different complaint. However, a complaint which touches upon and violates the individual rights of people to exercise their freedom of speech must be handled differently.

[Translation]

Mr. Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, I have a comment. I certainly do not have the experience of the Hon. Member of the New Democratic Party who started this debate, but I am absolutely astounded that he would have Canadians believe, while he is brandishing the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in front of the House of Commons, that he wants to defend those rights and freedoms when he actually wants to use the Government, the Government's executive powers, to interfere in the adjudication of a grievance involving this employee and Air Canada.

What the New Democratic Party is asking Mr. Speaker, and what the Liberal Party has endorsed by the kind of questions it has asked this week, is for the Government to interfere in a dispute, covered by a collective agreement, between an employee and her employer, and "guarantee" the employee's rights and freedoms. The same Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees that every Canadian may seek redress before the courts, so that our rights may be protected.

Mr. Speaker, what makes me different from a Liberal or a New Democrat is probably the fact that I have enough faith in our institutions and our laws to leave it up to the Charter and the guarantees it gives me that I can go before a real court—and not before a partisan court like the House of Commons or

the Government, the Executive—in order to deal with such a problem.

Mr. Deans: Mr. Speaker, I think the Hon. Member does not understand the problem. It is a very serious problem for the individuals concerned and for other people as well. This is not just a problem for this particular person. It is a problem that concerns other people and other employees as well.

[English]

What I am suggesting is that this goes far beyond just this one incident, and it would not have happened had the Ministry responded properly in the first place. This person has been put in jeopardy by virtue of what many people consider to be an inappropriate action taken in error by the Ministry, not by the Minister, by the Ministry.

[Translation]

Yes! Absolutely! It was a letter addressed to the Minister. It was a personal letter, certainly.

[English]

Miss Carney: Mr. Speaker, the point has been made that this letter should have received special treatment because it was a personal letter, that it was a "Dear Don" letter. I have a "Dear Don" letter here dated January 30, 1985. It states: "Dear Don, representations have been received from one of my constituents—" and the name is here "—a copy of his December 4 letter is enclosed for your information". It continues: "May I ask you to direct your officials to look into this situation. A report would be appreciated". This letter is signed by Ed Broadbent, the Leader of the New Democratic Party, and was replied to by the Minister who pointed out: "After receipt of your correspondence, officials of Air Canada were contacted to obtain their response to the concerns which have been raised". Is the Hon. Member suggesting that it was improper for a Conservative to file a complaint with the Ministry of Transport but it is not improper for his own Leader to file a complaint and have it dealt with in the normal manner?

• (1550)

Mr. Deans: Mr. Speaker, this is ludicrous. I would like to try to get my point across. There is a substantial difference between a letter asking someone to look into whether a bridge was built, whether a road was paved, whether the food on Air Canada's flight was any good or whether a flight can be changed in order to accommodate a different schedule for people who live in the area. Of course those types of letters can be sent on immediately. However, I am suggesting that when a complaint which infringes upon the freedom of speech of an employee is lodged, then a directive should go back to the individual complaining that freedom of speech is in fact a fundamental right in Canada and, therefore, there is nothing that can be done to take it away, nor should there be.

Mr. Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Hon. Member. The Hon. Member talks about what happened on