

Question of Privilege

has the right to express to the government its view on this matter, in the light of what has happened, and asks the government to give consideration to the question of making public the contents of this report. I therefore move, seconded by my deskmate from Skeena, this motion based on my question of privilege.

Hon. G. J. McIlraith (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to say something on the question of privilege that has been raised. I think I should first point out that what we are dealing with here is a report procured by Trans-Canada Air Lines from a firm of consultants. The former government, for some reason of its own but I presume a perfectly proper and correct reason, did not obtain this report, order its preparation or retain the firm of R. Dixon-Speas; rather, they requested Trans-Canada Air Lines to retain a firm of consultants, and Trans-Canada Air Lines did this.

The point was raised at the time, and the decision taken by the previous government was that it would not itself have this study undertaken but that the air lines would retain the firm. The air lines did that. The report was finally prepared some time, I think, in August—I am subject to correction on the date—and it does contain information of a nature that must remain confidential because it would be wholly destructive of the—

An hon. Member: Liberal party.

Mr. McIlraith: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member shows his complete lack of appreciation of the subject matter with which we are dealing. The report does contain material that cannot be made public because it would materially damage the competitive position of T.C.A. vis-à-vis other air lines, because the information would be of a nature not normally given by operating companies to their competitors. There is great difficulty on that score.

I had hoped that when the report came it would be of such a nature that it could be readily tabled and made public. I well understand the position of the Manitoba government, who are interested in this subject, and of other persons who have a natural curiosity to see the report, but there are two points I wish to make. The first is that the report is not a government document. It is a report having to do with the internal management of a company obtained by the company itself; therefore there is that reason for not tabling it. But quite apart from that reason, which was never the main reason relied on for not tabling it, the report does contain material that cannot be made public.

I have spent a great deal of time on this subject since last August, I regret to have to

[Mr. Knowles.]

say, in an effort to meet the problem, and I finally came to the conclusion that the problem could be met by taking out of the report those parts of it which cannot be made public for obvious reasons. To that end I had the government retain R. Dixon-Speas and Associates to delete from the report those parts that are of a purely confidential nature to Trans-Canada Air Lines, and gather the rest together so that it could be presented to the house, to the government of Manitoba and to the public.

I gave a lot of thought to this matter. At one time I contemplated having the Department of Transport do the deleting and at another time having Trans-Canada Air Lines do it, but I came to the conclusion that no matter how carefully they did it they would be subject to the charge of being an interested party. So I then decided that the correct way of doing it was to retain the firm which had prepared the report, and this is in the course of being done now. I do not know when it will be available. I hope it will be very soon, but I cannot say precisely.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Speaker, may I ask the minister a question? Do I gather from what he is saying that in effect he is prepared to accept my motion, which simply asks that the government give consideration to the question of making the contents of the report public? I gather he is prepared to make portions of the report public, and in that sense he could meet the terms of the motion.

Mr. McIlraith: No, Mr. Speaker, I am sorry if I conveyed that impression. The motion is quite objectionable on grounds I thought I covered. It cannot be accepted in its present form because the report very clearly contains material that no responsible government could consider publishing. But I have taken steps, I believe, that will meet the difficulty the hon. member seeks to raise now, and those steps were taken some time ago. In that context I would think the hon. member's motion should be one of commendation of the government for already having taken those steps some weeks ago, but the motion itself is quite out of order.

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Burnaby-Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport is quite correct when he says it was perfectly proper for Trans-Canada Air Lines to hire a consultant to look into the economic feasibility of moving the maintenance depot from Winnipeg. He is also quite right when he says that reports of this nature are usually confidential and privileged because they may contain information which, if made public, could do harm to Trans-Canada Air Lines or