

Statements by Ministers

A final word, Mr. Speaker. Bilingualism cannot be assured by the Government as a continuing characteristic of Air Canada if that corporation and its future is placed in the hands of minority shareholders. The Government is walking away from that commitment. Bill C-72 says that a Crown corporation means a corporation ultimately accountable through a Minister to Parliament for the conduct of its affairs. Under this plan Air Canada will not be a Crown corporation and the Government will not be able to guarantee that it will continue to provide bilingual services. The Government is again attempting to be half pregnant and generate as much smoke as possible.

Mr. Mazankowski: I guess I should have given you more time.

Mr. Tobin: This is a very disappointing statement. As I said before, you would need to have the face of a robber's horse to try and make it fly in this place. Air Canada, as presently constituted, flies very well, thank you very much, and we do not need this kind of half-baked scheme.

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, it is not surprising that this statement, which the Minister tried to smuggle in without giving adequate notice, got such a sharp negative reaction from Members on the opposition side. It should have had the same opposition from members on the government side if they really gave any consideration to the important step being taken.

We are changing a system which has existed for more than 50 years. We are doing it, not because there is a need for it, not because there has been any evidence that Air Canada is not efficient or has not operated for the benefit of the people of Canada as a publicly-owned corporation, but because of the blind ideological belief of the Conservative Government that the private sector can do anything better than the public sector. Yet there is no evidence of that at all.

As the Minister pointed out, Air Canada was established more than 50 years ago as a publicly-owned Crown corporation. This was done under a Liberal Government and Minister, Mr. C. D. Howe, who had the closest association with the big business community of Canada of any Minister at that time or probably since that time. Why did he do it? Not because he was a great believer in the virtues of public ownership. He did it for two reasons. First, because he realized the absolute necessity for Canada to have an air traffic system, and because he knew, as a result of his conversations and consultations with important leaders in the private sector, that they were not prepared to move in this direction. This was for a very good reason from their point of view. They could not see that they would make a profit at that time. After all, that is why private business functions. We do not question that. They operate if and when they can see a profit. They could not see a profit at that time so they were not prepared to do it. Mr. Howe and the then Liberal Government decided that we needed a national air service and established a Crown corporation.

Air Canada has been an efficient company. Even the Minister said that today. It has provided the people of Canada with high quality service, and not just in the high density traffic areas. Any company can make money serving people who want to fly from Toronto to Montreal or Ottawa or Vancouver. Over the years Air Canada has done what the private companies did not want to do because they could not make a profit. I do not blame them for that. That is the reason they are in business. However, Air Canada provided service to the sparsely-populated areas of Canada. It supplied service to small towns; for example, to Brandon, Manitoba. Since that town was sloughed off to the private companies it has had increasing difficulties getting service. The same is true of almost every other small town in this country. Competition and the need to show a profit every year has brought poorer service to most of the small towns and isolated areas in Canada.

We are seeing today another illustration of the failure of the Conservative Government and the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) to live up to the promises. I have before me a news story which appeared in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* on January 15, 1985. The headline is: "PM says CBC, Air Canada not for sale". The story goes on to say that the Prime Minister gave assurances that the federal Government had no plans to sell either the CBC or Air Canada. He is quoted as saying: "Some people want to buy the CBC. The CBC is not for sale. Air Canada is not for sale." That is what the Prime Minister said.

The people of Canada agree today with what the Prime Minister said in 1985. On March 5, 1988, *The Globe and Mail* published an Environics poll concerning the selling of Crown corporations. The question was asked: Do you think the Government should or should not sell Air Canada? The response was: should, 31 per cent; should not, 51 per cent. It was the same in almost every region.

A similar poll which appeared in *The Toronto Star* on March 31, 1981, conducted by Angus Reid. The poll asked whether or not the following corporations were well run. With respect to Air Canada, 63 per cent said it was well run and 20 per cent said it was not well run. Fifty-three per cent said the Government should not sell Air Canada to the private sector while 35 per cent said it should sell.

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An overwhelming majority of Canadians agree with the position taken by the Prime Minister in 1985. It is not the people who have changed but the Prime Minister, who is reneging on the promise he made in 1985.

The Government has prided itself on being different than the former Liberal Government. It said it would consult with the people and its employees. I am told that the employees who work for Air Canada were not consulted about this proposal to partially privatize Air Canada. There have been no discussion between their unions and the Government or the Minister