

External Affairs

Supplementary Paper

No. 53/28 CANADA, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AVIATION

An address by the Prime Minister, Mr. St. Laurent, delivered at a dinner given by the Government to the delegates of the International Air Transport Association, at Montreal, October 5, 1953.

Forty-four years ago the first flight ever to be made in what is now the British Commonwealth was made at Baddeck, Nova Scotia, just six years after the opening of the air age by the Wright Brothers. The flight in "The Silver Dart", as the craft was named, was made by John A.D. McCurdy, who has continued to contribute to the development of aviation in this country ever since. I should add that until recently he was serving his country in another capacity as lieutenant-governor of the province in which he made his historic flight.

In one of his early flights, Mr. McCurdy attempted to span the 105 miles of water between Key West and Cuba but was forced down into the sea a short distance from Havana. The failure to reach his goal on that occasion did not dampen his belief in the potential of aviation, for he cabled the Toronto Star about the incident in the following words: "Although not disposed to make any wild calculations...I am seriously impressed with the possibility of making inter-continental, trans-ocean flights by aeroplane".

It was a similar faith in other men combined with perseverance and daring that has made that cautious prediction sound amusing today. Many of you represent airlines whose ships now fly across great ocean distances as a matter of routine. So thoroughly have the techniques of ocean flight been mastered that it is difficult to realize that as recently as the Second World War, a trans-Atlantic flight was still a great adventure.

But Canada's contribution to aviation was not limited to the deeds of her early pilots alone. Canadians have done their share in the technical side of aviation as well. It was a Canadian, Walter Turnbull, who is credited with the development of the controllable-pitch propeller as early as 1916, an invention which much later became the standard equipment of all aircraft and which greatly increased their versatility and efficiency.

While I have only quoted two examples, I think it is fair to say that Canadians have done their share in the development of aviation. And I think it is also accurate to say that no country has so greatly benefitted from aviation and the development of air transport as has Canada. Millions of acres of our land consists of forests, mountains and lakes and Arctic tundra which provided almost insurmountable obstacles to communication until the advent of the airplane.

The great wealth of these areas, thanks to the achievements of the aircraft industry and to the courage and ingenuity of hundreds of bush pilots between the two wars, is now being exploited for the good of the nation. Our northern cities have become the communication centres from which these resources beyond the rail and highway are discovered and tapped. Every northern miner, fisherman, prospector, businessman or government servant is acutely conscious of his dependence on the airplane for his livelihood and for his contact with the outside world.

But it is not only along north-south lines that aviation is serving Canada. Our country is spread out for thousands of miles in an east-west direction as well, and in those thousands of miles are large island-like tracts of sparsely-settled territory between the populated areas. The advent of the aircraft has reduced those open spaces almost into insignificance and has contributed greatly to the development of that sense of territorial as well as national unity without which the term "Canadian" would be meaningless. The fact that a resident of the city of Montreal can now receive by airmail, the day after it was written a letter posted in Vancouver reduces the 3,000 miles between them and convincingly brings home the fact that both cities do really form part of one nation.

It is the realization of this most significant contribution of the aircraft industry to our national development and to our national unity assisted by the participation of thousands of young Canadians in two wars and the experience of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan that have made Canadians an air-minded people. That is why I believe that the decision to place the permanent headquarters of the International Air Transport Association here in Montreal was a logical one, and I hope, a decision that will not be regretted.

I need not tell you that the IATA has assisted and advised governments in drafting those regulations to control the airways of the world which can only be made effective by the joint action of sovereign powers. But speaking for Canada, I do want to state how grateful we are to have had that assistance. It is no exaggeration to say that the world airways would not be operated in the safe and efficient manner in which they are operated were it not for the work of this Association. You cannot be too warmly commended for the complex problems you have solved. The fact that, in so short a space of time, you have surmounted international barriers of currency, language, technical differences and business procedure in order to promote, in the words of your charter, "safe, regular and economical transport for the benefit of the peoples of the world..." offers proof that men of good will from many nations with greatly different political and economic conditions can work together for the good of all.

Your Association, composed of representatives from 120 nations and representing 95 per cent of the world's scheduled air traffic has done more than provide the world with efficient international air transport service. Even though complete unanimity is required at some of your special conferences before resolutions can be adopted, you have been able to reach agreement, a record envied by those of us who have to deal with international politics. And in reaching these agreements you have furthered the interests of the industry and above all the interests of the international public which you serve.

In this age of air travel and steadily diminishing distances, the nations of the world can no longer afford the luxury of hatred or even indifference towards other nations.

Your Association has demonstrated that fact by working for and bringing about ever-increasing international harmony and co-operation among the air transport companies of the world. You are encouraging those of us who have responsibility for the government of our nations to realize that complex international problems can be solved and that given good will and a community of interest, mutually helpful agreements are possible. And in the unhappy and unhealthy atmosphere that exists in so much of the world today such examples help us to resist the temptation to throw up our hands in despair before the apparent intransigence of some nations. No contribution towards international harmony could be greater than the encouragement set by your example and, knowing that they will be echoed by my fellow Canadians, I am pleased to repeat my words of welcome and my sincerest wishes for a successful meeting.

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