

**Statement on Conservative Air Canada Back to Work Bill**  
**House of Commons**  
**March 13, 2012**

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):**

Mr. Speaker, I am once again not pleased even to have a second opportunity to debate this particular motion, because the motion has once again shown an authoritarian side on the part of the government towards the labour component in this country.

The government has come up with basically two arguments to justify its work stoppage action at this time.

First it talked about the economy and the detrimental effects potential work stoppage would have on it. The [Minister of Labour](#) herself referred to a figure of \$22.4 million per week lost to the Canadian economy if the strike went ahead. This is the figure that the government has presented us with to understand the nature of the effect on the economy.

That \$22.4 million per week amounts to less than nine one-hundredths of a per cent of the economy of this country. It is really not a very large figure when we consider the economy of our country at \$1.3 trillion per year.

The labour minister has indicated that this loss to the economy is greater than the loss of the values that we have established in this country for collective bargaining and has made that determination based upon those numbers.

I find that to be very misleading with regard its impact on the economy and the need to move ahead with this thing, this bill, this closure, this stoppage of work action by both the company and the union involved with Air Canada.

In some ways our aviation industry has been hamstrung by the government over the past number of years. The New Democratic Party, and I myself as transport critic in the last Parliament, have stood in Parliament and talked about the impact that the government is making with its excessive airport rents, which in one year amount to about \$257 million to the aviation industry. The air travellers security charge amounts to a \$394 million charge against our Canadian companies. Fuel taxes are \$40 million. A total of \$748 million is levied against the industry.

The industry has to compete worldwide and it has to compete with American domestic carriers with airports located near our borders. The industry is under pressure, so of course it is trying to cut back on its labour component.

Let us look at the labour component in this as well. According to Transport Canada, air carrier cost breakdowns are as follows: labour is 17% of the costs of aviation transport in Canada; fuel is 32%; airport fees are 10% ; capital costs are 9.6%; purchase services are 5.6%; and other is 24%.

What we can see is that in reality, the problems with our aviation industry come back to the costs that it has to bear from the current government and previous governments, which have set up our airports as cash cows. Where does it come back to? It comes back to labour. It comes back to the labour component as a way to reduce its costs. It cannot do it with fuel, as fuel is internationally regulated. Other costs are also not subject to change, so where does the industry look for savings? It looks for it in labour, and our unions stand up.

What we have is a situation in which unions are standing up for their employees, government is sitting back collecting huge sums of money off the aviation industry, and the industry is in the middle. That is not a good situation.

What has the federal government done about that? Its response over and over again is, "We do not care. We are not worried about the aviation industry".

However, when it comes to the unions standing up for their workers, that is a different matter. When it comes to the money that the government collects from the aviation industry, it will just keep on doing exactly that.

When we look at the situation that we are facing today, we are looking at a government that is becoming increasingly authoritarian in its behaviour. It now considers applying back to work legislation to be just part of the routine. It considers it just part of the routine to reduce the debate that takes place in the House of Commons.

Quite quickly over the last year it has moved more and more toward an authoritarian type of behaviour. It is happy with it. Where it will lead us in the future remains to be seen, but it will not lead us in a direction that is going to be acceptable to Canadians, and we will see that over time.

The type of action that has been taken today is anathema to everyone who believes in Canadian values, in collective bargaining, in the rights of workers and the right of democratic discourse in the House of Commons. The bill takes a shot at a lot of us, and yes, we are standing up. We on this side will continue to stand up against those types of actions.

The minister has not proven her case. One statistic about how this is impacting the economy is all she provides to us in her speech. That is the analysis that she expects us to buy and live with for this type of legislation.

The other interesting subject that was brought up was the impact of the work stoppage at Air Canada on northern and isolated communities. Air Canada is hardly a major influence in the aviation industry in northern Canada. There are a couple of flights to Yellowknife and a couple of flights to Whitehorse. Both of those locations are well serviced by experienced northern airlines that provide regular service to southern destinations and also provide service through the whole of the north of Canada. These are good airlines. They are working hard to provide the service that Air Canada does not provide there and will not provide there. The situation there is that if the strike goes ahead, if the work stoppage were to go ahead, there would be no impact on northern communities; northern communities do not see Air Canada as an essential service, and for the government to even make that suggestion is completely wrong.

We are going to go through this exercise here today and tonight and we will end up with more back to work legislation enforced by the government. This is a situation that is intolerable, but is a situation we will have to endure for a while yet. Sooner or later the Canadian population will wake up to what is going on here, and when they do, the government will suffer the consequences.