

*Government Orders*

Coming back to transportation, which is the field with which, as my party's critic, I am most familiar. I said, in reaction to this budget, that the federal government had decided to hold a garage sale with Transport Canada. Why would I say such a thing?

I said it because the Martin budget announced program review cuts of \$1.1 billion, or 50.8 per cent of expenditures between 1995 and 1998. If we include the cuts from the preceding budget, Department of Transport spending will be reduced by \$1.4 billion between 1994 and 1998. In fact, the measures in the Martin budget will allow the government to save \$2.6 billion in the Department of Transport over three years as a result of the program review.

We should look at what makes us think that the government is getting out of transportation. Well, there are the moves to privatize announced in this budget, the planned commercialization of the air navigation system. First of all, let us be clear that most of the employees affected by rationalization in the government will be transferred to the private sector. A non-profit corporation will be set up, looking after the 5,800 employees now working for the air navigation system.

I would remind the hon. members that our party is not necessarily opposed in principle to the creation of a non-profit corporation in the move to commercialize the air navigation service. However, I and my party still have questions about this plan that we would like answered. Among other things, what would be the value of the assets transferred and what would the transfer cost? Before giving our full blessing, we will need answers to the questions that we will be asking at the appropriate time.

The second sector in which the government has announced plans to privatize is Canadian National. It will be recalled that the report of the government group, composed entirely of Liberal members—no members of the official opposition or the Reform Party were included—recommended that before CN could be put up for sale, its debt should be reduced, its profits increased and the network rationalized, among other things.

• (1245)

Again, it should be pointed out that CP's offer to buy CN for \$1.4 billion was totally unacceptable. This point was debated, and we had the opportunity to agree with the government that offering \$1.4 billion for CN's assets was totally unacceptable. We do agree on that.

It remains to be seen, however, how much CN's privatization will actually bring in. Let us not forget that CN is the property of Canadian and Quebec taxpayers. So, it should not be sold at bargain price to friends of the regime or those who make donations to the Liberal campaign fund. In that regard, the official opposition will play its role as a watchdog, to see if CN's purchase price reflects its true value.

The Bloc Québécois is now the only party defending the rights of the workers, including the right to strike in Canada, as evidenced by the NDP's failure to show up last weekend, when special legislation was passed to force resumption of operations in the railway industry. So, we will have to make sure that the rights of CN workers are not trampled in the privatization process, that their rights will be maintained. We will certainly get to talk about this issue again.

Also contemplated in this budget as part of the privatization effort is the commercialization of operations under the national airports policy. A task force was appointed by the Government of Quebec to provide assistance to those municipalities and local groups who wish to undertake negotiations with Ottawa on this subject.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Quebec's labour minister, Jacques Léonard, on taking a very worthwhile initiative in support of municipalities which may be facing airport privatization or even closure, because the problem has not been resolved. Considering that the airport in Sept-Îles lost \$1.9 million and the one in Baie-Comeau, \$1.2 million, while in Val-d'Or the airport is also running on a deficit, we have to ask ourselves if municipal taxpayers will be able to absorb these deficits?

It is important to bear in mind, when the federal government invests in our regions, these funds are not gifts to us. As a matter of fact, it is our money because, as far as I know, Sept-Îles residents receiving services from the federal government which is building an airport pay federal taxes through automatic payroll deductions or, in the case of professionals, make tax payments, so they are entitled to receive services from the federal government.

A fourth target for privatization in this budget is the motor vehicle testing centre in Blainville, which should remain in the hands of the government but whose operation will be handed over to the private sector in the course of this year. Negotiations are apparently under way. On this particular subject, we reserve comment as we have received information regarding some goings-on that are not very—I do not want to make a religious comment, but my colleague from Chicoutimi is suggesting that I should say not very kosher.

It is true that, like the hon. member, I come from the Saguenay. There seem to be some dubious goings-on with regard to this operation, but I cannot go any further because I want to save this for questioning the Minister of Transport in due course.

This budget provides for the revocation of the Western Grain Transportation Act and the elimination of a \$560 million subsidy. This subsidy created, once again, a double standard in Canada, especially in the railway sector.