

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Mr. Bouchard (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, once again the Hon. Member for Thunder Bay—Atikokan sees problems where there are none. This morning, at a press conference, I explained that the northern Supercontinental route was to be preferred because of the higher population density, and as for the southern route, we already had a section that was partly covered by the Rocky Mountaineer line between Vancouver and Calgary. I repeat, Mr. Speaker, the decisions were made in terms of a national network, a network we can afford and a network that can be viable!

[English]

Mr. Brian O'Kurley (Elk Island): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport.

People in Canada would like to see the involvement of the private sector in VIA Rail. What consideration has been given to involve the private the sector in the operation of VIA Rail?

Mr. Bouchard (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, what I said this morning and what I will repeat in the House is that we will be open to any good and reasonable proposal which will be made by the private sector and will be considered with a view to improving services for Canadians.

Mr. Russell MacLellan (Cape Breton—The Sydneys): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister says he saved VIA Rail. Well, he certainly did not save it in eastern Nova Scotia where its loss has been devastating.

This morning the Prime Minister spoke with a little girl who was a member of a group of students from Sydney Mines visiting Ottawa. She told him that if he did not save the trains her grandparents were not going to vote for him any more. The loss of those two votes is only the beginning.

• (1450)

Why has the Prime Minister, a graduate of St. Francis Xavier University, reduced eastern Nova Scotians to the level of second-class Canadians, when he stood in his place just a few months ago and said that there would be no second-class Canadians?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend indicates and probably quite accurately that as a result of this decision today we are going to lose votes. The fact of the matter is that we did not do this for votes. We did it because it is right for Canada.

My hon. friend refers to Nova Scotia where the rail link has been maintained six days a week into Halifax, where the maintenance centre in Halifax will be maintained. It is true that in Nova Scotia as elsewhere there are some lines that will be discontinued. We very much regret that. My hon. friend will recognize that we have worked very hard on behalf of Cape Breton with some of the initiatives taken and in eastern Nova Scotia, in particular.

My hon. friend is the first to know that the government and Parliament have had good results in some of the areas that we have involved ourselves in since 1984. The employment statistics are there to prove it.

It is true that there are these lines that are being discontinued, and we regret that very much. As my hon. friend examines the costs and the subsidy per capita required in each of these, I think he will come to the view that the taxpayers of Canada and the Parliament of Canada, which have other obligations in Cape Breton and we should assume more, can better spend taxpayers' money on behalf of a stronger Cape Breton and a stronger eastern Nova Scotia in ways other than those that we have followed in the past.

Mrs. Coline Campbell (South West Nova): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Prime Minister a question. Why did he not tell the electorate before the last election what he just told us now about the cuts to VIA?

Today they announced that the train which goes from Halifax to Yarmouth will be eliminated as of January 15, 1990. Ridership on the line that serves my colleague from Annapolis Valley, myself, and many thousands of constituents was up by 12 per cent in the first quarter of this year.

The Deputy Prime Minister gave the challenge to Canadians, and in particular to the people in the valley and in southern Nova Scotia, to use the train. They used it. The ridership was up by 12 per cent this year in the first quarter. Why did they cut it? They used it and now they have lost it. Why?