

productivity, overall environmental impacts, high speed rail in the corridor, and alternatives for the remote services. It must also know that what it is doing is wrong. The government must know that now it is the time to do the right thing. If this government cannot do that, all I can say, Madam Speaker, is "In God's name, go!"

[*Translation*]

Mr. Langlois: Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to the speech of my colleague from Miramichi. Admittedly, Madam Speaker, he worked long years and has much experience, particularly in the transport sector.

What gets me down when I hear his remarks is the fact that my colleague has been a Member of this House for a good many years, and he was here in 1981 when the Minister of Transport urged the government to reduce federal grants to VIA Rail.

Since the administration at the time governed as if they were a weather cock, changing their mind depending on which way the wind was blowing, the Minister of Transport lost his nerve and continued to hand out annual grants to cover VIA Rail's operating costs.

My question to our colleague is this: when he was sitting on the government benches, what did his government do to give VIA Rail a fighting chance to get out of the red and provide good service?

[*English*]

Mr. Dionne: Madam Speaker, first it gave VIA Rail its own management, which it does not have any more. It did not ask the president of CN or CP to run VIA Rail. It gave it a mandate. While it was not a legislative mandate, it did give it a mandate and it gave it funding to carry out the duties it was supposed to have carried out.

Now, I am not about to pretend that the government of that time handled the situation as I would have liked to have seen it, but it was a lot better than what we have today. It at least put a system in place that could in the future develop and prosper.

We now have a government and a minister that do not want even to talk publicly about VIA Rail any more. We heard the same thing from the minister today that we have heard over and over and over in Question Period. He has obviously been programmed. When he comes

into the House he slips a little disk in and it whirls round and round and round and we hear the same gobbledygook every time the minister is asked a question. It does not make any difference what the question is, the answer is always the same and it is simply that we do not have any money. He talked today about the increase in the deficit and I remind the hon. member that it was his government that doubled the total debt in one term over all the debt accumulated since Confederation. That is the kind of mismanagement we are talking about now. While I was not entirely happy with what the previous government did vis-à-vis the setting up of VIA Rail, at least it gave it a mandate and gave it equipment.

• (1410)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Gibeau): Resuming debate. The Hon. Member for Papineau—Saint-Michel (Mr. Ouellet) has the floor.

Hon. André Ouellet (Papineau—Saint-Michel): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise this afternoon and take part in this debate following my colleague the Hon. Member for Miramichi (Mr. Dionne). I am grateful to him for sharing with me the 20 minutes allocated to our Opposition Party.

I feel it is my duty to do so because this Tory Government's decision is extremely unfair, especially to the Province of Quebec. I just cannot understand how a Minister of Transport, representing a Quebec riding at that, can be so determined in eliminating completely the rail transport service, because as a matter of fact, the decisions made by this Tory Government are such that they undermine the very survival of the rail passenger service. It is matter of choice.

Since the Department of Transport is responsible for air, sea, rail and to some extent truck and bus transport, it is clear that the minister must strive to defend, through his agreement with the provinces— Well, we would have hoped that the Minister of Transport would heed the representations originating from the Province of Quebec. It is not only the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport which is seeking a one-year moratorium. So do the Quebec Premier him-