

I challenge anyone to manage a business that earns \$26 million and spends \$94 million and to operate that business for more than one or two years. In the case of a publicly-owned enterprise, it doesn't matter. Operating a company or business when it is publicly-owned is not a problem. We can spend as much as we want without worrying about the deficit; it's not important because it's public money.

Mr. Speaker, today Canada must face financial reality because we were not in power when it was time for action. It is because the Liberal Party has, over 20 years, accumulated a debt exceeding \$550 billion that Canadians must pay for it today. They did not take a position of conscience and assume their management responsibilities when it was time to do so.

Since 1984, Mr. Speaker, this Government has spent over \$2.6 billion. We are accused of being dinosaurs, of not investing money. Yet, we have spent \$2.6 billion since 1984, including over \$1 billion in capital expenditures. We are told we have not improved equipment. Yes, Mr. Speaker, we have improved equipment within our capabilities and our financial means without falling into the same trap as our predecessors and spending left and right without rhyme or reason. Back in 1976, when the present Opposition Leader (Mr. Turner) was Minister of Finance, the Government expenditure growth rate was around 29 per cent while it is between 3 and 4 per cent today. Well, we are now paying the bills they ran 10 or 12 years ago.

Mr. Speaker, rail transport is being compared to other modes of transport. As I said, it accounts for 3 per cent of total. Air transport, which is booming—we only have to look at large airports among others—accounts for 7 per cent of total. Car travel accounts for 84 per cent. Mr. Speaker, we would agree if the Government were to drop all assistance to road construction or if the provinces were to decide to freeze their budgets and concentrate on railroad transportation. However we simply cannot fly in the face of the fact that 84 per cent of Canadians going from one municipality to the next would rather take to the roads. And expansion in the trucking sector these days has to be one of the major components of a leading industry also operating from coast to coast, as much in the Maritimes and in Newfoundland as in western or central Canada. And what is

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more, Mr. Speaker, twice as many people would rather travel by bus than take VIA Rail.

The figures speak for themselves, Mr. Speaker: Canadians very much prefer means of transportation other than the train, and they have proven that.

Mr. Speaker, this is why we are subsidizing to the tune of \$641 million, and this is why people do not travel by train. We live in a country where people are free to decide how they travel from here to there. We have invested \$5.4 billion over the past 11 or 12 years, yet the rate of utilization has declined by 20 per cent during the last nine years. It is a pattern. After World War II, ever since the early 1960's, the utilization rate of trains has been falling. Our friends opposite led this country for 20 years. When they became aware of it, they invested heavily. What was the result? An utilization rate 20 per cent lower and again enormous subsidies.

As political men and women, Mr. Speaker, we have decided to be reasonable and to tell Canadians: This is what we can afford; on the basis of available resources, these are the services we can provide you with. That is the reason why we notified VIA Rail that we would reduce its subsidies by \$500 million within the next five years.

Mr. Speaker, we do not favour cars over trains. We do not feel that travelling by train is outdated. But for over 20 years now, Canadians have consistently demonstrated a lack of interest for rail transportation. As I said to my Hon. friend on several occasions, everybody wants to keep the train but nobody wants to use it. I do not know just how many times my colleagues across the floor took the train this past year.

• (1050)

[*English*]

How many times did they take the train in the last year? I am not sure whether a lot of people on the other side took the train the last year, but they want to keep it. Of course we want to keep the train, but we do not have the money, however. The Liberal Party does not care from where we get the money; it does not seem to matter. They have been spending money for 20 years. The country must face the reality of a \$320 billion debt and a \$58 billion deficit as was forecast by Mr. Lalonde for 1990-1991. The problem is that it does not matter to the Liberals because they do not care about money.