

*Adjournment Debate*

[Translation]

**Mrs. Éva Côté (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport):** Mr. Speaker, I think that the controversy concerning the western grain transportation issue has not been laid to rest. I am somewhat surprised to hear so many comments about the advertising campaign to tell people that Western Canada's transport facilities will be upgraded for all users, regardless of the type of freight transported. We are now witnessing a "war of figures", as some people are wont to say.

Mr. Speaker, if we keep in mind the interest rates and the costly inflation of 1981, the figures then provided by the railway companies concerning the investments that the Government of Canada had asked them to make to meet market conditions still seem fair and realistic, today in the context of the economic conditions prevailing at that time.

In case anyone should be in doubt, today is April 3, 1984 and the inflation rate is less than 4 per cent. Current interest rates are not running at 21, 22 or 23 per cent, but at 10.5 or 11 per cent. We have now been told that if the two railway companies were to slash their total investments to the tune of \$4 million, the number of jobs created would be reduced by about 50,000 person-years. I have no idea whether that is true or not. One thing for sure, Mr. Speaker, is that the commitments made through Bill C-155 to upgrade considerably and almost spectacularly Western freight transport, in either direction, mean that those projects will be carried out at current costs. The one undeniable fact is that the annual investments which will be made by the railway companies and the Government—with taxpayers' dollars, I agree—will be in excess of \$1 billion. I am being asked whether interest rates in 1990 will be 25 per cent, what the costs will be and how many jobs will be created. I cannot answer that today, Mr. Speaker. However, one thing is true, and the Members opposite should stop annoying the public with that: the fact is that the work has started and will be completed. The movement of all Western products, including the movement of grain, which will increase substantially, will become much more efficient, and thus less costly for the users, because there will be fewer delays and because our objective, which will certainly be met, is to have in Western Canada an efficient railway system which will benefit the whole country.

Mr. Speaker, I do not agree with those who think only in terms of so many person-years and of so many jobs created in relation with the amounts of money invested, without taking into account the evolution of the economy itself and of world markets, or what we can produce ourselves to be marketed and to meet future requirements. The 1981 forecasts were made at a time when interest and inflation rates were very high, but the situation has changed. I hope that I have answered the Hon. Member's question, Mr. Speaker.

● (1820)

[English]

RAILWAYS—TRANSPORTATION OF DANGEROUS GOODS. (B)  
DISTRIBUTION OF DEPARTMENTAL DOCUMENT

**Hon. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise concerning a question I posed on March 5 having to do with the transportation of dangerous goods. I am particularly pleased to rise following the presentation of my colleague, the Hon. Member for Kindersley-Lloydminster (Mr. McKnight). After listening to the Parliamentary Secretary and watching the expressions on my colleague's face, I sense that he is not better informed than before he posed the elaboration of his question.

This occasion, Mr. Speaker, gives me an opportunity to say that I believe the current Minister of Transport (Mr. Axworthy) is the most elusive and shifty Minister we have had in this Chamber in the last 15 years. He is ready to agree to almost anything politically advantageous or attractive. He is prepared to promise almost anything. But when it comes to delivering on those promises, he fizzles. He finds that he lacks Cabinet support or it is not desirable. In some cases he fails to act because his critics find his initiatives foolish. Such is the case with respect to the matter of the transportation of dangerous goods.

I asked the Minister what progress he was making in fulfilling a statement he made in the course of his speech to the Council of Transport Ministers in Hull on December 5, 1983, when he said that he had a firm resolve to make progress in improving the transportation of dangerous goods. He talked about limiting the speed of trains carrying dangerous goods through densely populated areas. He talked about labelling empty cars which had carried dangerous goods because they should be treated as though they were full. He talked about a whole host of things he was going to initiate. Three or four months have now passed, Mr. Speaker, and there is really little in the way of action. So it is with VIA Rail, grain transportation investment, air safety and deregulation. We are really not sure where the Minister stands. He is interested in short-term political gain rather than real improvements in the transportation industry.

This is a very dangerous approach, Mr. Speaker, when it deals with a matter so important as dangerous goods. We have to recognize that this not only affects the workers directly involved in the movement of dangerous goods, but indeed Canadians who are domiciled near the corridors through which these dangerous goods move.

It is rather interesting that the Minister came out swinging, saying he was going to get tough with the railroads, plan tighter regulations concerning the rate of speed, treat empty tanker cars as if they were full, and a whole host of other things. But low and behold the railways fired back and said his plan was foolish. So his get-tough stance really evaporated very quickly when the railways stood up to him. That is rather strange because just the other day he made a speech in which he said any overhaul of passenger rail service in Canada should address the needs of the traveller first and the railways