

Supply

de Belleval, and his tenure consequently was very short indeed.

Now we have the spectacle of the president of Canadian National, the company which could not make rail passenger service viable but which now makes a profit from VIA's operations, becoming the chief executive officer and the chief executioner of VIA. How cynical can a government be?

• (1400)

What about the minister, what has the minister done? Well, he and boredom, but with no conviction. He did not even make the decision. As far as I know it was made while he was ill, behind closed doors in the Prime Minister's office. The minister should have screwed up his courage and resigned rather than being used as a simple puppet by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance.

His actions remind me of a line from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* "About, about in reel and rout, the death fires danced at night". The death fires are dancing about this government right now.

When is the Deputy Prime Minister going to stand up and be counted? Has he totally changed his mind in a few short years? Is he not afraid to lose what is left of his credibility that once was relatively high? I can understand his embarrassment, but where is his commitment and his conviction? If he had had any conviction he would have done something, he would have at least spoken out. He is just as cynical as the Prime Minister and Canadians will remember what kind of leadership he displayed.

This government's action is the worst blow ever to befall rail passenger service in the entire history of this country. Not only is the railroad being bludgeoned, but lives and livelihoods are callously being destroyed, and for what reason? There has to be something more than profitability to make a country work.

Tory ministers went about the country during the last election campaign talking two main themes; free trade and good financial management. Almost before the writs were returned the debt was out of control and VIA had to be scrapped. Are they making way for Amtrak to come in, pick up the slack and provide rail service in Canada? Wouldn't that be dandy. Is that why we have a new president of VIA who is obviously in a conflict of

interest? Talk about putting the fox in charge of the chicken coop, Madam Speaker. I cannot think of a better example.

The government systematically refused to listen to the people even though it knew there was a public outcry. The government never showed any indications that it wanted to listen to the people of Canada. The people of Canada, Madam Speaker, have spoken about their views on the cancellation of VIA Rail. All the Prime Minister and the Minister of Transport were saying was that Canadians could not afford a rail passenger system. What a turnaround, what hypocrisy.

That is what this government was saying, while just about everybody in Canada was saying they needed and wanted an improved transportation system. And it is the people who pay the bills, it is not the government. The government has no money of its own, it has money only from the taxpayers of this country. That is what this government was saying while just about everybody else in western countries, even underdeveloped countries, were modernizing and improving their rail passenger service.

It should surprise no one that the government did not want to have public hearings. The government did not want public hearings because it did not want it known that it is completely out of touch with Canadian reality. But thanks to the determination of most of the members of the Standing Committee on Transport, the committee was able, against the wish to the government, to hold public hearings. Those hearings once again indicated that there is widespread opposition to the government's plan to decimate VIA Rail. And if it has any respect for the democratic process, if it has any respect for its constituency, if it has any respect for the people that it represents, the government must go along with the recommendations of this committee.

The government must declare immediately a moratorium on the announced service cuts to VIA. It must amend, by order in council, the terms of reference of the Royal Commission on a National Transportation System and charge it to examine rail passenger service and make an interim report as soon as possible. How cynical that a government scraps a service then appoints a commission to report three years hence what should have been done.

The government must direct the royal commission to undertake its interim report on rail passenger service to give particular attention to the following items; a legislative mandate, future equipment requirements, improved