

*Supply**[Translation]*

The members opposite are saying that the government should start putting in place a high-speed train system in Canada right away. In the past, these same members condemned the government for making expenditures we could not afford. I have a little problem with their proposals, with the logic used by the people opposite.

First, there is a study under way to determine if a high-speed train would be viable. The people opposite ignore the findings in these studies, but they want a high-speed train system right away and blame the government for not having done so already. Wait a minute. Keep this idea in mind for one minute, Mr. Speaker.

We can only conclude that the members opposite want to build a high-speed train, even if it were not viable. Otherwise, why would they not wait for the results of the viability study? But no. They want to build it, whether or not it is viable, so that when we find out that it is not viable, they can rise in the House to blame the government for building a system that is not viable and wasting money. That is the logic used by the people opposite. If I am not mistaken, the railway expert, the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, has just told us that it is viable. We can conclude that he is referring to a study dating back to God knows when. He could perhaps share it with us so that the House would be better informed on this.

[English]

There are a number of other issues to be addressed. One of them is property taxes as they affect railroads. Property taxes in Canada generally cost something like 14 per cent of the expenditures of railway companies. That has been said by the Peat Marwick Stevenson and Kellogg group of consultants. In the United States approximately 8 per cent of municipal taxation is applied to railways. That is a big difference for railway viability. It increases the cost of operating railroads in Canada and makes them less competitive.

Those are the kinds of things I know the minister is looking at. He needs to do that kind of work to make rail lines in Canada competitive.

• (1530)

In the long run if we do not ensure that our railways are viable, that they operate properly, the alternative will be no railway at all. We cannot continue with a system that inflicts debt after debt, loss after loss on the railway companies and expect they will be around for a long time. That is not going to happen.

We have to make them viable. We have to make them work properly and competitively so they can be around, provide transportation for Canadians, provide transportation for our

goods which we export and import into Canada and provide jobs for those Canadians working in that very worthwhile industry, the railway and transportation industry.

That is why I cannot agree with the motion proposed by our colleagues across the way. I condemn it and I wish the members across would have offered something constructive to help save our railway industry in Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Osvaldo Nunez (Bourassa, BQ): Mr. Speaker, of course, I do not agree at all with the government whip, especially with his anti-union speech.

The high-speed train is viable. It will link the two most densely populated provinces, the two largest cities, Montreal and Toronto. Rail transportation is going through a serious crisis. I agree with the motion of the Bloc Québécois which condemns the government's policies concerning the railway system and the gradual abandonment of the services provided by three companies, CN, CP and VIA, especially since these abandonments are occurring mostly in Quebec.

Thousands of jobs have already been lost and now employers want to reopen collective agreements to reconsider job security, fringe benefits and wages and to ask for some more concessions. They are acting in complicity with the government and especially with the Department of Transport and the companies, the employers. In Quebec, the rail transportation unions affiliated with the FTQ have joined forces and are doing a remarkable job.

I just received copy of a brief on the current situation in the railway industry prepared by local 4334 of the CAW, the Canadian Auto Workers. Quebec is hard hit, because services are being transferred to Western Canada. Is this the kind of Canadian federalism you want to force on us? Yes, Quebec is the province most affected by this crisis in the railway industry. Services are being transferred, mostly towards Winnipeg.

Would you agree to a moratorium in order to reconsider the situation in the railway industry, to set up a consultation committee made up of representatives of the governments, the unions and the companies to examine whatever remedial measures can be taken and to act before the railway system in Canada deteriorates further?

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, three things ought to be pointed out. First, nothing in what I said was anti-union, quite the contrary. It is not anti-union to want and try to protect jobs in short-line railways. All claims to the contrary are false.

Second, as for the moratorium, the hon. member is aware that a parliamentary task force has just started a study on the whole issue of rail transportation in Canada. This task force will tour several Canadian cities and will report to the Minister of Transport.