

Supply

against it. It had to pay out, using taxpayers' money, \$77 million to CN and CP for that old, worn out equipment.

Twelve years ago, the youngest car was 25 years old. The youngest car now is 37 years old. However, we were assured by six successive Ministers of Transport, and that is how many we have been through since 1976, all of whom said they and their governments were committed to a viable, at least break even, safe, reliable national rail passenger system.

The first three Ministers were from the previous Liberal administration, all of whom are unlamented. Mr. Lang is the one who started VIA Rail with the \$1 item in the Estimates. He told us in 1976 and again in 1977 that there would be a VIA Rail and a national rail passenger transportation act.

• (1230)

Then there was Jean-Luc Pepin. He is the fellow who undertook 21 cut-backs. I remember hearing the Conservatives, including the Hon. Member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski), raising Cain with the then Government and the then Minister of Transport about cut-backs on 21 routes.

Then there was the unlamented former Minister of Transport, a sitting Member of the House at this time, the Hon. Member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. Axworthy). There is good reason why he is not the transport critic for the Liberal Party.

Mr. Milliken: He has been moved up.

Mr. Benjamin: The Hon. Member says he has been promoted. Transport happens to be the largest Department in the Government. He got promoted down, not up.

With Mr. Lang we did not get legislation. With Mr. Pepin we got massive cut-backs and no legislation. The present Member for Winnipeg South Centre kept the cut-backs, brought in no legislation and no new equipment. The three of them said: "We will re-equip VIA Rail so that it can function the way it should".

Mr. Milliken: What about the LRCs?

Mr. Benjamin: It took four years to get the bugs out of the LRCs before they started operating half decently. All the locomotives had to be overhauled—and they were brand new. I ask the Hon. Member not to tell me

about LRCs. If the Hon. Member knew anything about transportation I would not mind his intervening.

Along came 1979 and the Hon. Member for Vegreville, who is also the Deputy Prime Minister and was the Minister of Transport at that time, said on November 21, 1979, "This Government is indeed encouraging the revitalization of rail services throughout Canada". In October, as reported in the *Calgary Herald*, he said he wanted to bring romance back to VIA Rail, back to train travel. As reported in the *Halifax Chronicle Herald* on October 11, 1984—and this is after the Hon. Member for Vegreville had his second incarnation—he said: "At long last Canada has a federal Transport Minister who has a vision of rail passenger travel in this country". It was refreshing to hear him talking of high-speed services in the Montreal corridor and between Edmonton and Calgary. It was pleasing to hear him speak of new locomotives and cars for the use of VIA Rail in the Maritimes.

In November, 1984, the Hon. Member for Vegreville said, "We intend as well to put in place a proper legislative mandate that will ensure that it will continue to work providing the type of service that will make all Canadians proud".

In May, 1985 he said as reported in *Hansard*: "I can assure the Hon. Member that we are committed to revitalizing rail passenger service. We are also committed to putting in new equipment."

In December of 1985 he said: "The drafting of the new Passenger Rail Act is in its final stage. Many attempts are being made to improve the attractiveness and therefore the ridership of VIA Rail".

In February of 1986 he said: "I can indeed reconfirm this Government's commitment to viable rail passenger service in this country".

We have had nothing but a double-cross and a betrayal.

There were two other Ministers who followed in the footsteps of the Hon. Member for Vegreville as Minister of Transport. There was the Hon. Member for St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie) who said in May of 1987: "Because of the additional funding we are now providing for VIA Rail, it will be able to go forward with its plans to construct maintenance facilities in Winnipeg, Vancouver and Halifax". What do we need brand new maintenance