

Private Members' Business

northern Quebec, a region which relies on the discovery of new mines and new deposits for its development.

The people of Chibougamau—Chapais are proud. They depend neither on the Quebec government nor on the federal government for their livelihood. They are involved in mining operations, make good money and contribute to the economy of this country, of Quebec, of the Saguenay—Lac—Saint—Jean region and of Abitibi as a whole.

What you have here is an entire region not begging for hand-outs or asking the government to go out of its way to create temporary jobs, an entire region capable of creating real, productive employment to help increase Canada's gross domestic product. You have people willing to contribute to our collective wealth. Are jobs not scarce these days? When any initiative should be welcome and every effort should be made to support economic development and job development instead of investing in social programs, temporary programs and even infrastructure programs?

Here is a suggestion. The hon. members and ministers opposite are out of ideas and are wondering how to pull the country out of this recession. They are looking for ways to regain the considerable number of jobs lost in Quebec since the beginning of the recession. Figures published this week revealed that—if these timid actions are all this government has to propose—it will take three years to restore the level of employment enjoyed in Quebec before the recession. But when the people of Chibougamau—Chapais find new mineral deposits, propose economic development solutions, try to increase the wealth of this country, they see their initiatives jeopardized because the Minister of Transport disowns his signature.

The Minister of Transport refuses to be sensitive to the people of Saguenay—Lac—Saint—Jean, of Chibougamau—Chapais. The Minister of Transport is no longer the man of the situation and the government refuses. The people responsible for setting up the economic team which it lacks flatly refuse to see the light.

• (1345)

The unemployment problem is caused by people who refuse to seize opportunities. However, the people of Chibougamau—Chapais, in desperation, decided to take matters into their own hands, to make up for this government's inefficiency, to thwart CN's plans and they called for the privatization of this trunk line. Let the champions of private enterprise stand up in this House, if there are any among the members across the way. They wanted to privatize the network, to have CN transfer the Franquet—Chapais line to the people of Saguenay—Lac—Saint—Jean—Chibougamau—Chapais for the nominal sum of one dollar so that they could keep this section in operation until such

time as it will become absolutely indispensable, with new mining discoveries. Let these people hang on to this life buoy, this line which CN wants to dismantle.

The request was made. Our people did their job. They asked CN and they got this answer: "We would get \$5 million for the line's old steel—the railway being made of steel—, so we are going to sell the line to you, the people of Chapais, for \$5 million." Big deal! CN is acting as if it had not stayed in business because of the taxpayers' money, as if it was the railway's sole owner and had paid for it without the help of taxpayers. It is forgetting that the Franquet—Chapais line, like all other rail lines in Canada, was paid for by the hard work of generations and generations of Canadian workers.

Why should we deprive people of the opportunity to take charge of their own lives? Could someone across the way explain to me in a sensible way, without partisanship, trying only to think that we must help people, that we were elected to support our people, to defend them, to help them earn a living, could anyone explain to me why we should refuse the request of people who are not asking for anything, but only to buy for a nominal sum a rail line which was closed down by CN? Why refuse that? Is it impossible to respond to these demands? I appeal to my colleagues on the other side. I appeal to the Minister of Transport. I appeal to the Minister of Finance and Minister Responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development. I appeal to all my colleagues on this side of the House and my colleagues in the Opposition. Why should the government not reexamine such an issue and allow people to take control of their lives and ensure their development? What else does it want? Did it ever receive a more attractive proposal from a group of citizens who want to live, who want to survive, who want to ensure their development without asking anything from the government? I am proposing to the government a job creation program that will cost only one dollar, but will bring in lots of money to the government and will allow people from our region to use that infrastructure. While the government is putting millions and billions of dollars into the development of infrastructure that does not exist, it keeps citizens from acquiring, for one dollar, something which already exists and which is necessary. Explain that to me, Madam Speaker.

Finally, I would like to tell you that this issue is very serious for my region and for Saguenay—Lac—Saint—Jean. There are so many raiy lines in western Canada. And we agree that they are needed.

• (1350)

We understand that for the sake of the economy in that region, it is necessary to use rail lines as links between urban and rural centres, in order to transport grain and various commodities. We understand that. There is no one on this side who has asked to