

uncertainty and confusion in the transportation industry, I really wonder what possessed the Official Opposition to present such a motion. Earlier, I was even more surprised when I heard the Member for Halifax West (Mr. Crosby) say that the present Government was appointing Liberals to a number of positions within the Canadian Transport Commission and the Government itself. Mr. Speaker, I realize they are upset, but what is the alternative if all the competent people who are best suited for these duties happen to be in the Liberal Party? We are certainly not going to avoid appointing them because they are Liberals. The Government has always insisted on selecting the best candidates and the best people available when filling vacancies in the Federal Public Service. I realize this may upset our friends opposite, but they cannot expect us to penalize people who are suitable for these positions just because they are Liberals. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, I think it is too bad that the Official Opposition feels that our present Minister of Transport has created confusion in the transportation industry in Canada. In the few moments I have left, I shall try to tell the House that in one sector in particular, and I am referring to the railway transport sector contrary to what our hon. friends opposite would have us believe, the Minister, since his appointment, has taken some very brave decisions aimed at avoiding any confusion that might exist and at proving the Canadian Government's commitment to a transport mode that is both indispensable and very convenient for many of our fellow citizens across this country.

Mr. Speaker, we must realize that with respect to the railway transport system, the Government has made commitments and has promised to meet them. It will make this kind of transportation safer and more efficient across this country. Moreover, Mr. Speaker, while meeting this commitment, the Minister of Transport has also informed Canadians that we would have more and better quality service. I think we have every reason to be pleased that the new Minister of Transport has made this commitment.

I can assure you that people in regions of the country where there are no means of transport other than the railway will be the first to admit that the decisions made in the past and those which will be made in the coming months serve the best interests of all Canadians.

If we really want to talk about the rail transportation system, Mr. Speaker, I think we should turn back the pages of history to have an overview of what happened in that field. I think that we have been witnessing tremendous changes within our transportation system since 1977. Still, one must admit that the Canadian railway network was not built overnight. I am convinced that in the next few years, people will come to realize that, in a large country such as ours and with all the regions we want to have rail service, it is extremely difficult to improve everything in one day or even in one year.

We have to take into consideration the regional disparities and the land irregularities of our country, and remember that

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the railway represent a link in the history of Canada. That is indeed what prompted Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and British Columbia to join the Canadian Confederation. All those facts prove that people across Canada are very fond of that transportation system and that many Canadians are looking forward to improvements.

Today, Mr. Speaker, a delegation from my own riding of Bonaventure-Îles-de-la-Madeleine arrived here in Ottawa to attend an important conference and, of course, they came by train. Mr. Speaker, those are some of the people who know very well that the Government has to upgrade the system. I have had an opportunity to discuss that issue with them and to work with them on the various changes we want to make in the system.

Of course, the railroads have had enormous problems since 1885, but we certainly chose the right solution in 1976 when we created VIA Rail and made it responsible for all passenger rail service. We must also remember, Mr. Speaker, that, in 1958, automobiles accounted for 87 per cent of all passenger transportation in Canada. We must therefore take some action to convince the public that automobiles may not be the safest and the most economical means of travel.

After creating VIA Rail in 1976, the Government had to deal with many problems. The Government decided to rationalize railway passenger service and minimize the costs in that area. This is why, in 1983, the total operating subsidies allotted to VIA Rail amounted to just \$451 million, a mere 4.5 per cent increase over the previous year, which was far less than the rate of inflation.

In my opinion, those figures clearly show that the decision made by the Canadian Government in 1976 was the right one and that we are really on the way to improving this transportation service.

As I was saying earlier, Mr. Speaker, we also had to provide a dependable service all across Canada. This is why, as my colleague for La Prairie (Mr. Deniger) was saying a while ago, the Minister of Transport has decided to rehabilitate certain lines and, most importantly, to develop the Quebec-Windsor corridor. Of course, VIA Rail is making a major effort to provide a good service in this corridor, without however neglecting other lines and other areas in Canada. As I was saying, the railroad helped to unite this country, and we must now make sure that the service will continue to exist in 1984 and in future years. In addition, Mr. Speaker, the railways must serve the public, not just the business sector. This is the direction this Government wants to take and this is what the Minister of Transport has done to improve our transportation services and make train travel more attractive to the Canadian public in all our regions.

Finally, I believe that we have to realize that the social and political factor plays a very important role in the way people choose their means of travel. I also believe, Mr. Speaker, that it is extremely difficult to assess the efficiency or the perform-