

one. That is the reason why I am a little disturbed to hear the Prime Minister saying: "Well, if the other governments do not want to take part in a national railway system, then too bad, we will not have one".

Second, the member gave us some interesting statistics. The main reason that he gave those statistics was to show that some lines are not being used as much as they should be used. There is one in particular I want to ask him about, that is The Canadian. It was told to me not too long ago that by 1993 VIA with its present statistics would be running The Canadian at full capacity. What I heard from the constituents of Kenora—Rainy River this summer was that The Canadian was full, you could not get a ticket on it. Again, in essence they were right. You could not get on there. In the summer months it was running at a capacity of 96 per cent. It was full, you could not get a ticket. You could not go to Sudbury. You could not go to Winnipeg on that particular train. Lo and behold The Canadian is now gone.

I ask the member if he can explain to me based on those figures the fact that VIA told us that the reason why they were not putting more cars on that train to make it more viable—and it was only running 11-car trains—was that there were no more cars available to put on that train. I wonder why the member would not be interested in making a line that is considered to be one of the best in the country more viable by putting more cars on it.

**Mr. Belsher:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his questions. I can assure the hon. member that this government in terms of regional disparities and looking after the regions has spent more money during this past four or five years than the previous government ever did. We believe there is a role to be played by the federal government in trying to ensure that the regions are not handicapped. He mentions the one line, The Canadian, which runs from Toronto to Winnipeg, to Calgary, and on to Vancouver, as being cut out. Yes, there have been some very difficult decisions made in what had to be cut.

The minister gave instructions to VIA management to reduce spending to \$250 million per year by way of government subsidy in four years' time. That is down from the level of \$641 million. There have been some very difficult decisions made. We must remember that in terms of the places that were cut out along the way there are alternate means of getting around. The occupancy

rate over the whole line was considered, I think, at the 70 per cent rate. There could be times of the year—I think he made reference to 90 per cent—when it could be higher, but the fact is that VIA Rail has had to be shrunk in total size. That is what this exercise has been about.

We had to make sure that the largest number of people could be accommodated, that the largest population base would still be serviced. Also, we had to ensure that the corridor from Quebec City through to Windsor would also have the bulk of its services retained, which has happened. Faced with the financial restraints that have been given to VIA management, these are the recommendations that have come back to us. The government, with whatever alternatives were given to it, has decided to carry them out.

I would hope to see a successful conclusion to some of the ideas that have been coming out of the travel agencies which would like to invest, to put in something similar to the Orient Express that would run from Toronto through to Vancouver, through our scenic Rocky Mountains. That would still be a way of travelling for the people who want to take an excursion, or a holiday, something that is entirely different, something which allows them to see something of the grandeur of our great country.

**Mr. MacDonald (Dartmouth):** I am pleased to be able to ask a few questions of the parliamentary secretary concerning these cuts.

Coming from Atlantic Canada, I can tell you—and I am sure some of your colleagues on your side of the House have already done this—that the people of Atlantic Canada feel very much betrayed by the government's inability to keep up with its own rhetoric about holding on to the dream of a national rail transportation system.

A few years back, we had the then Deputy Prime Minister telling us that the government—the Tory party—was committed to building a viable national network, revitalizing the train service. We had recently, I think in the spring, the National Transportation Agency going around the country, holding public hearings chaired by an individual who spent many days in this house, the former Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Nielsen, the chairman of the NTA.