

• (1255)

On a more specific note, I want to say that in Quebec and in my riding, there can be no economic future without a profitable railway system, and such a railway system can obviously ensure economic development and also be financially viable. To do so, we need the co-operation of all the people involved. This is what we, in the Bloc, are trying to do and we can only hope that the government join us in our efforts.

**Mr. Patrick Gagnon (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the hon. member's comments. We are discussing a national policy, but the previous speaker talked about converting Quebec's railway system to electric power.

I find it hard to see how we could ensure national co-ordination if electricity is used in Quebec but not in the rest of Canada. I would really like to know what would be the costs of an independent service in Quebec, as proposed by the opposition, and I wonder if the hon. member can provide an answer to this very legitimate question.

**Mr. Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead):** Mr. Speaker, with all due respect for the hon. member representing Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, I realize that he does not know anything about the railroad issue and I would hope that, in the few hours of debate left, the government will be represented by people who have some basic knowledge of the issue.

When Bloc Quebecois members, and certainly myself, talk about the future of the railway system in Quebec, it is of course in the context of a larger network which would include surrounding provincial or federal states, including the United States. I remind the hon. member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine that, during the debate on free trade, sovereignists were the strongest and most vocal supporters of that option. In fact, Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney paid tribute to the current deputy premier of Quebec, Mr. Bernard Landry, who travelled across Quebec, and even Canada, in support of the free trade accord with the United States, back in 1988.

Sovereignists are not afraid of economic challenges. We have no problem whatsoever with competing. We are well aware that we live in North America and we want to develop economic, cultural and social links as much with Canada as with the United States. In that respect, the railway system is a tool among others. My colleague, who has experienced railway systems in Europe, made it very clear a few minutes ago. In Europe, railways cross borders almost every 600 or 700 kilometres and there is no problem. Nobody ever said: "We will have a network in France, but no connection with Belgium, Italy or Spain".

### Supply

Obviously, when my colleagues and I think about railway development, what we have in mind is a network linked to all of Canada, as well as the United States. In fact, the railroad in my riding is an international line, since it goes across Quebec and Maine, on to New Brunswick. It goes without saying that we must think in terms of the whole continent when we look at the railway system. We hope to save our domestic network so as to be able to connect with American networks as well as Canada.

• (1300)

As regards the use of electricity, it is one of many options, and as good as many others. My colleague was simply trying to show that, with a bit of imagination, there are solutions which could ensure a promising future for the railways.

**Mr. Mercier:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine made a reference to what I said about electrification, so I would like to add that electrification is an option that offers tremendous economic as well as environmental benefits, for Quebec and Ontario, two provinces that produce large amounts of electric power.

What I meant is that if Quebec were a sovereign State, it could look at the option of electrification more independently and with greater emphasis on national interests, I would say, than would be the case today, when we have people lobbying to maintain the use of oil. I may add that some railway lines, and I have travelled on these, use oil on one section and electricity on another section. It is not a major problem.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** Does the hon. member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead wish to comment?

**Mr. Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead):** Do I have any time left?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** Yes, of course.

**Mr. Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead):** Yes, Mr. Speaker, I would like to elaborate on what the hon. member just said. Basically, his point was, and I mentioned this earlier, that we should look at all the options or at least keep all our options open in the railway transportation sector as in all other sectors.

The hon. member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine asked some of my colleagues what position the Government of Quebec would take on this matter and what the position of the municipalities would be on taxation. He was referring to the fuel tax.

I would like to comment briefly in this respect, since during the past year, I was very involved in working with people in my community to raise public awareness of the future of railway transportation. I think that important progress was made during the past few weeks, and I am delighted to see that.