

Adjournment Debate

the rail passenger service in this country. It has grave implications for at least 1600 workers who will be affected directly, plus countless other workers who will be faced with job losses and dislocation as a result of the indirect effects. There is no question that this decision has long-term implications for many people.

While I am happy to see the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) in the House this evening and I appreciate the fact that he is here—I know he is a very busy man who has a lot on his platter—I was expecting his parliamentary secretary to be here this evening to talk about the cutbacks and how they relate to the labour component of the service. It is interesting to note that the parliamentary secretary who, although he is loyal to the minister and does support wholeheartedly the actions of the minister, represents a large area—the Winnipeg area—where some 500 people will be directly affected as a result of this cutback. He is also aware, I am sure, that the removal of the Northern Transcontinental will have a tremendous effect upon the tourist industry. I am sure he is aware there will be no direct service between Saskatoon and Winnipeg. The town of Rivers, Manitoba, will be deleted from this service; Watrous and Melville will have no service at all. It is a very serious state of affairs.

The other thing that bothers many of us is that there is a double standard in the minister's announcement. He has given the commuters a year to adjust and respond to his decision, but for those most affected by the regional and trans-continental cutbacks, the guillotine will fall on November 15.

Today, in the House, the minister admitted the costing order is out of date, inadequate and unfair. That view was shared by the Canadian Transport Commission, in a decision which was published recently with regard to a hearing that was conducted in the Province of Manitoba. The minister admitted as well that there would be changes. The costing order is at the heart and core of the financial problem with VIA Rail. Under the costing order, 63 per cent of their budget is uncontrollable because it is spent on services that are provided by CN and CP, which is basically a *carte blanche*, cost-plus or open-ended, however you want to describe it. Since the minister acknowledged that we should have a new VIA Rail act to outline clearly its mandate, it should be brought before the Parliament of Canada for a full parliamentary debate.

Since we have such a problem with the costing order, I cannot see why the minister is proceeding with such undue haste. Lay-off notices have been served, new schedules are being implemented. I heard today that they are scrapping some of the existing railway passenger cars in anticipation of the cutbacks on November 15. To all intents and purposes, it is a *fait accompli*.

I understand legal action will be launched tomorrow. Even while legal action is being taken, all these things are happening. The minister is forging right ahead. There is a vigorous debate going on in the House, the Senate, the Joint Committee on Regulations and Statutory Instruments, as well as throughout the country. The minister proceeds in his arrogant and arbitrary fashion. It is not inconsistent with the actions of this

government, as evidenced by its pursuit of the Constitution and the energy program.

The minister should understand that clearly because I think he does understand Canada. He has had much experience travelling back and forth across this country, working on the constitutional task force.

● (2215)

Given the fact that the minister understands the regional make-up and the diversity of this country, I cannot for the life of me understand why he would refuse to conform to what has become a very historical and traditional practice in this country, and that is the practice of holding public hearings on issues which are so important and fundamental to the Canadian people. The minister refuses because he says it would take too long and that he is not excited about giving the CTC a direction. Well, the routes which are being dismantled were in fact established through very extensive public hearings, based upon the criteria of public convenience and necessity by the CTC. If the government of that day did not agree with the CTC decision or directive, it should have used Section 64 then. It should not wait two years before using it. To me that is really the fundamental part of the violation of the spirit and the intent of Section 64 as it conforms to the principle enshrined within the National Transportation Act. I think this is a very, very dangerous precedent.

Today I was handed a document, which was provided by the Railway Transport Committee, the rail economic analysis branch, dated October 21, 1981. I would be pleased to table it because, out of 18 different applications, on only two occasions were public hearings not held. The precedent is clearly established. I urge the minister with all the conviction I can muster to reconsider his plan and to give the Canadian people an opportunity. I urge him to give those who are affected an opportunity to be heard. I urge him to defer the decision and let the Canadian traditional and historical process in this country work. I think the minister will find that his job will be a lot easier, and he will derive a great deal of satisfaction—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but his time has expired.

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised by the psychology displayed by my friend, the hon. member for Vegreville (Mr. Mazankowski), here tonight and the other day. I took it for granted that he was a man of great passion, dedication and rather rapid action. I thought that was him, but I can now almost believe that he has been saved for the demonstration of the opposite by the fact that he stayed in power for a relatively short period of time, because the only thing he has been talking about—or the main thing; I should not be unfair—besides the great lessons of democracy he has been giving me and others so generously is the concept of a delay. He is looking for a delay. He thought he would bring about delay by invoking action through the Canadian Transport Commission, which he knows well would have taken two, three or four years. There is no other way.