

over the past five years. This works out to 400 seats a year, a far cry from the figures quoted by my colleague.

[English]

I would like to ask my colleague about his experience after many years spent working on the rails and sitting on committees and commissions regarding passenger rail transport in Canada, namely, VIA Rail.

Since 1977, \$5 billion of taxpayers' money has been put into VIA Rail, out of which \$1 billion was for capital expenditures. In spite of that support provided by the taxpayers of Canada, the number of passengers using VIA Rail has decreased between the years 1980 and 1988. Last year, VIA rail transported fewer people than it did in 1980, in spite of the fact that \$5 billion of Canadian taxpayers' money has been put into VIA rail. I would like my hon. colleague to comment on that situation and to give me his views.

Mr. Benjamin: Madam Speaker, to my good friend I want to say that I used the tour operator example. My friend was there to hear that witness. He said that he was about the smallest operator. He also spoke about the dozens of others who do several times more business than he does, with blocks of seats, berths, compartments, bedrooms and so forth on VIA Rail. This is just one small example, the smallest one. You add them all together and you have tens of millions of dollars of tourism business, both direct and indirect, which involves VIA Rail.

On the matter of the \$5 billion that has been put into VIA Rail, I do not like people who say "I told you so". I said to the Minister of Transport in 1978, the late unlamented Otto Lang, and every one since then that they should start off with the required investment of \$1 billion in capital expenditure for 50 new locomotives and the station property.

You should have seen how the CPR rooked VIA Rail. It tried to get \$15 million for the station property in Regina. We finally got it down to \$3 million, although it is only worth \$1.5 million.

That is the sort of thing that went on. VIA Rail had no choice. Some of that \$1 billion was overexpenditure on real estate and station properties. On capital expenditures, most of the \$1 billion went into refurbishing old equipment, and that is throwing good money after bad.

Supply

Some of those cars should have been put on the scrap heap the day VIA Rail began.

To illustrate further to my hon. friend about the victimization of VIA Rail, it had to pay over \$77 million to CP and CN for that old equipment that was not fit to operate. The taxpayers got stuck. Both CP and CN had amortized that equipment off their books years before that. It was gravy. Before VIA Rail sold its first ticket, before its first train left the station, VIA Rail started with \$100 million in the hole.

What a way to run a railroad. You guys do not know how to run one, never have, and at the rate you are going, you never will.

Mr. Maurice A. Dionne (Miramichi): Madam Speaker, this may be the last chance for this government to demonstrate that it has any respect left for representative democracy and the people of Canada.

You will recall that when the previous government cut a number of VIA routes in 1981 many of the people who now occupy the Treasury benches had fits of apoplexy. I admit that it was not the most glorious act of the previous administration. In fact it was a disaster and a significant contribution to the defeat of that government. I include my own defeat in that as well, but at least I learned something from it. It seems that there must be some kind of elixir in the exercise of power that dulls both perception and memory.

Let us go back a little bit. I was the chairman of the transport committee at the time, and the Deputy Prime Minister was the critic. He was supremely unhappy with the committee hearings. He was particularly incensed that the government would not give the committee a reference to travel and hold public hearings throughout the country. He had his colleagues organize their own travelling road show, and I think he was right. When the Conservatives came to power he restored many of the routes. They tooted their own horn about it, and that is okay too.

However, during the last election campaign Conservative members bragged about the restoration of VIA Rail, even while they had to be secretly planning the decimation of VIA. The Prime Minister took his band of merry men and women to the quiet of the Gatineau Hills and there he ordered the decimation of rail passenger service in Canada. However, there was at least one man who recognized the government's folly in decimating VIA, and he said: "no". That was VIA's president, Mr. Denis