

*Supply*

**Mr. Benjamin:** The Bill would require only one page; we are still waiting for it. In fact, we will use the Hon. Minister's amendment made in committee last year. I will put the title on the Bill for him if he wants and I will help him move it. I will second it for him.

**Mr. Axworthy:** I will second it.

**Mr. Benjamin:** The Hon. Member for Winnipeg-Fort Garry said that he would second it. Who was it that voted down my amendment and the amendment of the Hon. Minister of Transport last September? It was the Hon. Member for Winnipeg-Fort Garry. The Liberals have a lot of nerve bringing up anything to deal with transportation or grain.

**Mr. Mazankowski:** I will hold you to your word.

**Mr. Benjamin:** Okay. Removal of the crap—

**Mr. Mazankowski:** Removal of the what?

**Mr. Benjamin:** The removal of the crap on the Government side that took place on September 4. I only hope that we do not have to go through that again with the present Government.

I wish the new Minister of Transport a lot of luck. He is going to need a lot of help from this side because I believe that his colleagues on the cabinet committee, on the committee which is headed by the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. de Cotret) and the Cabinet as a whole will not be overly sympathetic to the things I know he would like to get done. In fact, his Department has been one of the hardest hit. As I read it, the cuts to his Department amount to \$288 million. But I think there has been a dispute, and it has been suggested that they amount to only \$282 million. In any event, \$282 million was taken from the Department of Transport. All of that is self-defeating. It means that VIA Rail will barely struggle on even longer under the same kind of policy and with the same criteria it had since 1976. Nothing has changed.

The present Minister of Transport will agree with me about how frustrating it was for us when, for six or seven years in a row, three different Ministers made their reports on estimates. All we heard about was the purchase of new passenger locomotives and the purchase of new transcontinental passenger equipment. We got the same thing every year for six years in a row.

**Mr. Axworthy:** You got the trains this year.

**Mr. Benjamin:** They are still not there.

**Mr. Axworthy:** Open your eyes.

**Mr. Benjamin:** I would invite the Hon. Member for Winnipeg-Fort Garry to take a train for a change.

**Mr. Axworthy:** I did.

**Mr. Benjamin:** I would invite him to take that transcontinental. I have not yet been able to find a new car on it. That

kind of cutting back and that kind of delay is now being continued.

• (1530)

We are so far behind in this field it makes the whole country feel embarrassed. We used to lead the world. I have been on trains in the United States, Europe and Australia where they have copied the technology which Canada developed. Those countries have new passenger equipment on service. Even British Rail, which does not have very many long hauls, has an overnight sleeping car train which runs from Inverness to London. It puts our trains to shame.

I would like to refer again to something I spoke about last Thursday in my reply to the Throne Speech. Where a debt is acquired or a deficit is enlarged for productive purposes, that debt is self-liquidating. When new equipment is purchased for VIA Rail that new transcontinental equipment would pay for itself within three years in reduced operating and maintenance costs, and increased use by the travelling public. It is a self-liquidating debt. It is an investment, not an increase in the deficit. It is not used to pay off interest charges and other debts. Most of that investment would go into the private sector. It would keep people in Thunder Bay, Trenton and wherever they make railway equipment working, or it would put those people back to work. Certainly, it would put an end to the waste of the millions of dollars which are spent every year by VIA Rail on the maintenance, repair and refurbishing of old passenger train equipment.

The real tragedy is that VIA Rail started off with the deck stacked against it. It was designed to fail. The first thing which VIA Rail faced was having to go to the taxpayers for \$77 million or \$80 million to reimburse CN and CP for old passenger equipment. At worst, VIA Rail should have bought that equipment for \$1 a car. All of the equipment has been depreciated down to zero and written off. The expenses of that depreciation had been deducted from the income tax of the railway. The taxpayers got stuck a second time around. VIA Rail began with that kind of a handicap and nothing has changed. Nothing has changed since Otto Lang started it; his next two successors continued it.

The present Minister could have announced—and maybe he will do it today—the placing of orders. A year and a half lead time is required. Even if the orders are placed today it will be a year and a half to two years before the equipment will be on track. We have waited long enough.

VIA Rail does not need a \$93 million cut, it needs \$93 million more in investment. That investment would pay for itself within a very few years. If that means increasing the deficit by \$93 million, so be it. That money will go into something which the country needs. It will provide jobs, which will put people back to work, and they will again pay income tax.

I would like to speak about the cuts in the CN Marine ferry services on the East Coast. Those of us who have sat on the Standing Committee on Transport for the last 16 years—which includes the Hon. Member for Vegreville and the Hon.