

Oral Questions

Mr. John Harvard (Winnipeg St. James): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the same minister.

The slashing of VIA Rail service will cost up to 800 jobs, directly and indirectly, in my province of Manitoba. The cuts and lay-offs are justified by this government on the need to improve VIA's efficiency. However, VIA's corporate plan, and I refer the minister to page 18 of the plan, says that VIA's operating subsidy per passenger mile will increase by over 50 per cent in 1990.

Is this the minister's idea of efficiency? Is this any way to run a railroad?

Mr. Bouchard (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, very briefly I just want to say to my friend that if he will read these documents he will see that the province of Manitoba and Winnipeg in particular will lose 217 jobs.

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COMMENTS OF FINANCE COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Right Hon. Prime Minister who will be well aware that two weeks ago the chairman of the finance committee insulted Atlantic Canadians by calling them all "nobodies".

• (1450)

Then last week he insulted all senior citizens in the country. Yesterday he fanned the fires of western separation and western alienation by referring to westerners as "ignorant, stupid, out to lunch" and then he threatened to send in grade five teachers to educate Albertans.

Will the Prime Minister do the honourable thing and extend an apology to all western Canadians on behalf of the chairman of the finance committee and do the right thing and ask for his resignation? If not, why will he not do that?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I should tell my hon. friend, you should hear what he calls me.

I know what you call me. I have not read the remarks to which my hon. friend refers. I imagine when I do that the grace and elegance of them will leap off the page.

But I will examine them very carefully and I will speak to the member as soon as I can and I will report back to my hon. friend.

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, I am not asking the Prime Minister to report back to his hon. friend. What I am saying is that there are many members in this House who are representatives of the people of Alberta. Many of us were born and raised in the province of Alberta, as is his seat-mate. We consider these kinds of remarks, to be called stupid and ignorant, insulting and we would expect the Prime Minister to do the honourable thing and indicate right now whose side is he on? Is he on the side of the chairman of the finance committee, or is he on the side of grass roots Albertans?

Mr. Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry. I have not read the transcript of the remarks. I understand that the committee is moving from city to city and I have a tough time keeping up with the comments that are being made. I am starting to quiver because he is heading down toward eastern Quebec, but the Quebecers figure: "What the hell, you had him last week".

I will examine this carefully. I think we all know that the chairman of the finance committee is known for things other than the elegance of his language. But he is known as a very hard working, devoted parliamentarian, and I am sure that he would have nothing but the highest regard for all westerners, and in particular, my hon. friend.

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VIA RAIL

Mr. Maurice A. Dionne (Miramichi): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. If he is quivering now, wait until he hears from the patrons of VIA Rail.

The Prime Minister has admitted by establishing a royal commission that he has no idea of the transportation needs of Canadians now or in the future. Yet he has chosen to destroy a rail transportation system that is vital to the future and which is absolutely essential for the maintenance of this country.

Why did he wait until yesterday to establish a royal commission? Why did he not establish a royal commission into VIA Rail in 1988 when he still supported it?