

### Supply

• (1245)

Then, and it is still on the table, CP Rail presented a bid to purchase CN assets for \$1.4 billion.

A few weeks ago, Bloc Quebecois members have met with senior CP executives to clarify the contents of the proposal put before CN management and government authorities. We came out from this meeting with more questions than answers.

As I said earlier, we are particularly concerned about the fact that the federal government seems to want to divest itself of assets that belong to the people of Quebec and Canada as a whole. Regarding the CN railway system, we must bear in mind that this is a public company. Therefore, CN facilities across the country belong to the taxpayers of Quebec and Canada.

We are very concerned that a private company like CP could buy this system and then do whatever it feels like with it. This is the main criticism we, the Official Opposition, are directing at the government.

As we said in our motion, which refers to the government's lack of transparency on this issue, we find it unconscionable that the government is making decisions on the future of the public rail system, at least the part belonging to CN, without the people—or at least the socio-economic stakeholders—the Official Opposition and the Reform Party being consulted on and participating in the upcoming decision on the future of the rail system.

Regarding the sale of facilities to CP, we will need much more information and many more assurances from the government if it wants us to approve this deal.

Most of the Quebec portion of the CP line from Saint John, New Brunswick, to Sherbrooke goes through my riding of Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead. This line belongs to CP. For several years now, we have witnessed CP's "demarketing effort" to discourage potential industrial clients from using their services, as well as the difficulties experienced by local people. Their attitude seems slightly different today since CP needs people's support to buy CN—But when we see how difficult it was in the past to obtain information from CP, we are entitled to ask ourselves what will happen when this company takes over the whole network in Eastern Canada, and especially in Quebec. It would take compelling arguments to convince me that this is a good deal.

I would like to say a word about the federal government's criteria for assessing the networks to be abandoned or sold off.

• (1250)

Everyone agrees that the two main criteria are profitability and the public interest. Everyone also agrees that east of Winnipeg—and this is not partisan separatist talk, because it affects Ontario and the Maritimes as well as Quebec—profit-

ability is the criterion used by the National Transportation Agency to decide on the future of a railway or branch line.

How can local people show that a rail line is profitable? I would say that they almost have to prove it foot by foot and not for the whole line. I will just give an example to illustrate what I am saying. The rail line which concerns me, the one from Saint John to Sherbrooke, has a client about 10 km west of Sherbrooke called Eka Nobel. This company alone does over \$3.5 million of business with CP every year to move its merchandise.

When the time came to consider the profitability of the railway east of Sherbrooke, this customer located 15 km west of Sherbrooke was not taken into account. This shows the ridiculousness of such a situation where figures are made to say what one wants them to say.

For the future of railways in western Canada, public interest is the criterion used. To prove this point, and no one can challenge this, I take the subsidies for shipping western wheat; for the current year, about \$600 million of our tax money will be used to pay for the transportation of wheat in the West. There is no equivalent in eastern Canada. This policy is a double standard which obviously puts rail service in eastern Canada at a disadvantage.

To conclude, I would like to say a word about the future of rail transport, since this morning, the minister—as I said and repeated earlier—accused the Official Opposition of wanting to maintain the status quo. When my colleague who spoke just before me talked about a moratorium on abandoning rail lines throughout Canada, and especially in Quebec, the reason we are asking for a moratorium is not to maintain the status quo but to let the local and regional stakeholders and the Government of Quebec meet with representatives of the federal government to discuss alternatives. Alternatives exist. Later today, some of my other colleagues will talk about short lines, which Quebec law encourages and permits. To establish a short line, the local community must take charge.

One of the problems the railway system has to face is the loss of interest of the population these last few years. There are several reasons for this change of attitude, including the fact that the railway companies, the CN and the CP, have chosen to keep their operations secret. Because of the way the CP handled things in my area, potential users no longer want to do business with this railway company, and our people lost interest.

So, we need to hold a real debate. This is why I hope the speeches made today in this House will not close the debate on the railway system, but rather launch a truly public debate on the issue, a debate in which the government and the opposition should take part and make their position known, to reassure the population that the railway system will be maintained and expanded throughout Canada.