

Supply

representative of the bus companies. I guess you could say that that figures.

I noticed with great interest that the witnesses were from right across the sociological and political spectrum of Canada. Trade unionists, free enterprisers, chambers of commerce, mayors of cities and towns of different political stripes were unanimous in opposing what the government is proposing.

Most interesting, since tourism is such a valuable industry in this country, was a witness we heard yesterday who is a tour group operator. He is only a small operator. There are dozens of others who do much more business, who book space on VIA Rail. He cannot do it any more. Just that one little firm did something like \$4 million to \$5 million worth of business last year and considers VIA Rail a business partner.

When the vice-president of Amtrak was in front of the committee he did not try to tell us what we should do. He just told us some facts and gave us some information. This is to give you a good illustration of what has been done to VIA Rail and the taxpayers since 1977. He told us the Amtrak trains that run from the U.S. border to Montreal, from the U.S. border to Toronto, have to pay Canadian railroads three times as much as they pay American railroads to run their passenger trains over their tracks. If that does not tell my hon. friends opposite something, I do not know what else could.

There is another item. VIA Rail had to part with \$14.5 million last year in provincial and federal diesel fuel taxes. Name me another country where a transportation company that has to build, maintain and operate its own right-of-way has to pay fuel taxes which are nothing more than a subsidy to road users. There was \$14.5 million in wasted taxpayers' money. It is unfair treatment of VIA Rail, CN and CP. Why in God's name are they paying diesel fuel taxes for their diesel locomotives? If they could run them down the Trans-Canada Highway they would be quite happy to pay those diesel fuel taxes. It is another example of one of the cards in the stacked deck on VIA Rail.

The committee worked very hard and very sincerely and, as my hon. friend over there will agree, we worked many hours. We heard all the witnesses and whether we agreed or disagreed with a witness, we were impressed. We worked hard at coming up with a report that

hopefully all of us but certainly most of us from all sides of the House could support.

That brings me to my closing remarks. If parliamentary reform means anything at all, then the government can do no less than act upon our recommendations. We had a unanimous report. This is only the second time, by the way, this has happened in my 21 years here, a unanimous report of the transport committee.

After our trip to Europe we made a unanimous report which the government has ignored every since. Why did we bother? Why did we waste taxpayers' money and the expense to all those witnesses out of their own pockets if the government was going to ignore the committee's report?

• (1350)

Similarly, the royal commission is an academic exercise. It is already a *fait accompli*, what this government intends to do about transportation. Members of the government have jet engines for brains. Everything the government has done at airports, ports, the seaway and VIA Rail has been backward, the opposite to what it should have been doing.

Is it not interesting that VIA Rail's subsidies are cut three times a week? Well, gee whiz, 12 so-called self-sustaining airports lost \$60 million last year and have debts of over \$800 million. Why do we not make those 10 airports operate only three days a week?

Surely what we recommended to Parliament and to this House makes sense and provides a chance for VIA Rail to succeed, instead of the deliberate activity of this government to have it fail.

[Translation]

Mr. Langlois: Madam Speaker, I listened very closely to the remarks of my colleague from the riding of Regina—Lumsden (Mr. Benjamin), and I agree that he has a lot of experience and long years of service, particularly with the transport committee.

Still I should like to point out to him that, when he referred to the tour group operator or to the firm which booked space on VIA Rail, the figures he used may have sounded impressive because he was talking in terms of millions of dollars.

Perhaps I might remind him that the tour operator told the committee he had booked 4,000 seats on VIA Rail