

● (1500)

**Mr. Cosgrove:** I would say, Madam Speaker, that it is very easy for any member in this house to take any particular item of expenditure and throw it up as an example in that scene. But I would ask them to consider as well the increased commitment of this government, for example, to those most in need, the co-ops and non-profit people and those with low and middle incomes who have been assisted recently right across the country with the increased allotment for those kinds of people.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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### VIA RAIL

#### CUTBACKS IN PASSENGER SERVICE—REQUEST THAT MINISTER RECONSIDER DECISION

**Hon. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville):** Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport. Given the record high level of unemployment currently and the fact that the Minister of Transport, by his statement of July 27, in which he announced the cutback of Via Rail service by 20 per cent, will directly affect the jobs of 1,600 railway workers, plus countless hundreds of others who will be indirectly affected, and given that this decision will inflict severe hardship upon millions of Canadians who need and use the trains, not to mention the economic impact particularly with regard to tourism, and given the fact that since the minister's announcement we now have a new energy agreement with projected gasoline prices rising to \$4 a gallon, which in itself will necessitate an expansion and further development of public transportation systems rather than a reduction—in light of these new factors I would ask the minister if he will not now reconsider the shortsighted, illogical and arbitrary decision he announced by way of a press conference on July 27, thereby denying Parliament, the CTC and the Canadian public an opportunity to respond to his decision?

**Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport):** Madam Speaker, I find answering the question is not easy because my friend posed at least three questions in the same sentence, that is, energy, the effect on labour, and other matters.

I have a suggestion to make to him. There is one thing I have missed throughout the summer. It is the lack, unfortunately, of the opportunity to meet my colleagues on both sides of the House to explain that decision we made on July 27. If he wants to co-operate with others I am sure a way will be found for the committee on transport to invite me to appear, at which time I will go and explain and justify the policy in terms of all the questions the member has raised.

**Mr. Mazankowski:** Madam Speaker, I am sure the minister knows very well that the hearings we conducted were public and open to anyone, any Canadian or any group of Canadians who wanted to appear, and he certainly would have been welcome. As a matter of fact a lot of Liberals, members who

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call themselves Liberals but who have some second thoughts about it now, did appear before us, as did members of other political parties. Just for the purpose of clarification, Madam Speaker, is the minister saying in his answer that he is prepared to refer this matter to the Standing Committee on Transport before a decision is taken? If the minister were to do that I think it would certainly restore some confidence in the mind of the Canadian public that there is in fact some semblance of democracy in this country. If he does not, then the minister is clearly breaking with tradition, historical patterns, and perhaps even convention.

**Mr. Pepin:** Madam Speaker, I did not intend to do that. What I had in mind was that during the summer the committee had a mandate to investigate generally transportation matters in Quebec and Ontario, if my memory serves me well enough. It seems to me that if the committee wanted to hear our explanation of the policy, that could have been located within its mandate.

My hon. friend is quite right when he says that 1,600 employees of either VIA or CN and CP will be affected. My hon. friend is aware that \$30 million are in a program to take care of the situation by way of pre-pensioning, by retraining and so on and so forth. There are answers to the three questions he has raised and I am looking forward to the opportunity of giving them.

#### REQUEST THAT STANDING COMMITTEE CONSIDER MATTER OF PASSENGER TRAIN ABANDONMENT

**Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill):** Madam Speaker, my question is also for the Minister of Transport, who has been described as the worst thing to happen to passenger trains since Jesse James. Jesse James held up the railroads, and the transport minister is holding up 1.2 million VIA Rail passengers.

Since the federal government has bypassed public hearings by the Canadian Transport Commission, has ignored the demands of the public for better train service, and has violated statutory agreements and federal and provincial statutes, will the minister now at least refer this matter of passenger train abandonment to the CTC or refer it to the Standing Committee on Transport? Rather than just showing up and explaining what he has already done, will he refer it to the committee in such a way that the committee might have an opportunity to undo the damage he has already done? Will he consider doing that?

**Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport):** Madam Speaker, I have already explained quite a number of times why the government felt it should go by way of orders in council, which is quite legal. The reasons are essentially two. The first one is that such a reference to the CTC was made before, in 1976, and the results were not those that could have been expected. That is the first one. The second reason is simply that had we gone to the CTC we would have had to give indications or directives to the CTC which would have