

Oral Questions

maintain and work continuously a line of railway from Esquimalt to Nanaimo.

Now, once again the government puts the boots to Vancouver Island and the west. How does this government square its call on provincial governments to stick by their commitments on constitutional change when it trashes a 106 year old agreement and commitment to the people of Vancouver Island?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, we have honoured all of our contractual agreements. If in fact there is a case to be made that case will be made in court.

Mr. Ross Stevenson (Durham): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Transport.

Will the minister direct his officials to negotiate an interim agreement with Ontario to continue the passenger rail service on the Toronto-Peterborough line until such time that GO Transit might otherwise take it over on a permanent basis?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I wrote to all my colleagues at the provincial level to discuss any proposal which could be made by the provinces, particularly for the Toronto-Peterborough-Havelock line.

We have immediately started discussions, and I am quite confident that we will reach an agreement to transfer the line Havelock-Toronto to the GO Transit system in Ontario.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réginald Bélair (Cochrane—Supérieur): Mr. Speaker, my question is also directed to the Minister of Transport.

By cutting the vast majority of VIA Rail's secondary routes in Canada, including Cochrane—Kapusksing, Marathon, Terrace Bay, Schreiber and Nipigon, the Minister is telling senior citizens, the poor, students and the disabled that they no longer have access to affordable transportation.

How does the Minister think these disadvantaged groups will be able to travel in Canada?

Mr. Bouchard (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, when I consider the ridership rate on the routes to which my hon. friend referred, people were certainly using other means of transportation as well, because 85 per cent of Cana-

dians, on these routes and elsewhere, take their cars, 5 to 10 per cent take the plane and the bus, which means that about 5 per cent of the local population, and this applies to any other region in this country, takes the train. So I have to assume that 95 per cent of senior citizens will continue to use the means of transportation they were using before.

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary for the Prime Minister.

I would like to ask him about the insensitive way his Government made cuts at VIA Rail. During the 1988 election campaign, the Prime Minister was bragging about how he had restored VIA Rail services in certain communities across Canada. So why did the Prime Minister cut VIA Rail services by 25 per cent between Ottawa and Toronto and by 40 per cent between Ottawa and Montreal, in my riding? Why did the Prime Minister once again forget to tell Canadians the truth during the election campaign?

Mr. Bouchard (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, quite simply because in order to give all Canadians a national network, we did what we had to do to apportion railway services between Vancouver and Halifax. According to the Hon. Member's proposal, with the money you left us we would only have a network between Toronto and Montreal. Thanks, but no thanks.

[*English*]

Mr. Rey Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport.

Given the maintenance centre in Winnipeg will be completed in 1990 at the cost of \$13.5 million, given the drastic cuts to VIA services announced yesterday, and given that the president of VIA wears the same hat in CN, could the minister assure this House and Manitobans that this newly constructed centre will remain a viable centre in Winnipeg and that it will not be given to CN but that it will be retained for VIA?

Mr. Bouchard (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, the operation of the maintenance centres in Winnipeg, Vancouver, Toronto or Montreal is a corporate decision by VIA Rail.

What I know is that the Winnipeg centre will continue its operation but that it will be done in light of the decisions made by the corporation, VIA Rail.