

transportation seriously. One clue to that is the comments by the Minister of Transport; another is that the government seems to rely only on the hon. member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine to respond to remarks by Bloc Quebecois members. He often seems to lead us off into debates that have nothing to do with the debate at hand. Clearly, the government does not take rail transportation seriously.

As my colleague, the hon. member for Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans pointed out this morning, the Bloc Quebecois has been asking for almost a year that the Standing Committee on Transport examine the whole issue of rail transportation. This has been denied us for all kinds of reasons, each one shakier than the other, and this means that after a year of Liberal government we are in a worse situation than before.

I can tell the Minister of Transport right off the bat that what the Bloc Quebecois wants is to know where the government is going in the area of rail transportation. His responsibility is to tell us what direction he is taking, what he intends to do after a year in his portfolio. We want the government to protect the interests of all Canadians, but more precisely, as far as I am concerned, the interests of Quebecers and particularly the interests of my constituents, severely affected by the decisions the government is taking in the area of rail transportation. I will come back to that.

We want a real public debate on the future of rail transportation. We want real solutions. We, in the Bloc Quebecois, refuse to identify as the only scapegoats employees of CN and CP and their so-called golden collective agreements. When you consider the perks given to the president of CN, which were mentioned by my colleague from Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans, and the outrageous benefit that a house represents, I think it is rather foolish on the part of the government to single out unionized workers for the lack of profitability of rail transportation in Canada, especially east of Winnipeg.

The reasons why I insisted for so long for a debate on this subject led me to wonder about the future of a rail network in Quebec.

• (1240)

And I will say right away for the benefit of the hon. member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine that my comments arise primarily from a concern about the future of the rail system in Quebec, linked of course, with North America as a whole.

I have been looking at the rail question for several months now, and have seen the threat of the slow but systematic destruction of its rail network looming over Quebec.

Supply

My riding, Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead, provides the perfect example of the sort of hypocritical manoeuvre the federal government is planning to carry out in Quebec. The abandonment of the line linking Sherbrooke, in the Eastern Townships, and Saint John in New Brunswick, is being threatened for January 1, 1995. This abandonment was ordered by the National Transportation Agency under the former government. I mention this again so that the hon. member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine will not have to rise in the House and blame the leader of the opposition for all the decisions taken since the beginning of Confederation.

This abandonment would be a real economic disaster for the Eastern Townships, with potentially devastating consequences for the entire area, and I would go so far as to say for the whole of the Eastern Townships.

And yet, while we are experiencing a crisis of major changes and drastic cuts in the rail industry in Quebec and in Canada, the Standing Committee on Transport—and I point this out again—has always systematically refused to look at the rail question, despite the repeated requests of the official opposition representative.

We are told that the committee must focus on the future of the aviation industry, the future of airports, and that there is therefore no time for the future of rail, an industry that in 1993 employed close to 50,000 people across the country. No time! The committee has no time! Realizing the ridiculousness of the situation, the Minister of Transport announced, last September 29, the creation of a task force to examine the possible privatization of CN.

But to make sure it would not interfere with schemes to dismantle the Quebec railway system, the minister took the trouble of appointing an all Liberal task force, with only one member from Quebec sitting on it. The minister need not worry; this task force is not likely to make much noise.

The question we must ask ourselves at this point is: why is the government so afraid of having Bloc members on this task force? Why have such a suspicious behaviour that resembles a conspiracy? Upon analyzing the whole issue, the federal government's sinister intentions in the railway system become clear.

I would now like to review briefly the events of the past year regarding the rail issue. The minister referred to it this morning.

First, there was the statement made by the CN chairman, Mr. Paul Tellier, in December 1992, who apparently wanted to merge the CN and CP railway systems. This period of a few months was referred to as the CN-CP operations consolidation period. For reasons unknown to us, since all was done in secret, this plan fell through sometime around June 1994.