

Summer Recess

On this basis there seems to be no case for the federal government to terminate VIA Rail Canada's transcontinental passenger train service through Edmonton. No case for the rail transport committee of the Canadian Transport Commission to approve an application for such termination . . .

During June, according to VIA, transcontinental trains leaving Calgary carried a total of 12,621 passengers. Those leaving Edmonton carried 539 more.

July figures for Edmonton are expected to be much higher. That's largely because VIA has been adding equipment to Edmonton trains since early June, and is still adding, in order to handle increased sales.

We would like the facts exposed. We should not be subjected to an edict by cabinet circumventing the regulatory process, with no recourse or opportunity for the Canadian people who are affected to express their dissatisfaction or objections to the move. I call upon the Minister of Transport and all members of the government to consider seriously the implications of this step before engaging in such wholesale abandonment as is proposed.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mazankowski: I think the mayor of Edmonton summed it quite well in a telegram which he sent to the Minister of Transport. In part it reads:

At a time when Canada should be building communication links, your government appears to be attempting to destroy them in one of the most important areas in Canada. Surely at such a critical time in Canada's history we should be building a spirit of co-operation, and not separating parts of Canada. Any unilateral decision by your government can only be detrimental to a unified Canada.

Another telegram from the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce reads in part as follows:

This proposal is completely and totally unacceptable to the residents of this area. Such a move would greatly increase the feeling of alienation in western Canada.

The telegram from the Edson and District Chamber of Commerce reads in part as follows:

The Edson and District Chamber of Commerce strongly recommends that the federal government prior to any firm decision being reached allow the communities and the persons involved the right and opportunity to voice their objections to this proposed partial or total withdrawal of this essential rail service.

I am sure concerns and objections are being expressed in every part of Canada. If the Minister of Transport does not want the CTC to deal with the question, then he should refer his proposal to the parliamentary committee before he makes a firm decision. He should let the parliamentary committee consider the package and hear witnesses who want to express their views. Then he could make a decision. It should not be done unilaterally. It should not be done by a decree which can only hurt the people in the community and add to the divisiveness in the country.

I am sure the minister will be aware of the fact that VIA Rail is deeply starved for capital to improve its equipment. I think it has done an excellent job in merchandising, but it has to back it up with the product. VIA Rail is at the point right now where it can almost be charged with misleading advertising. It has a good marketing approach, but it needs the product to back it up. They need at least \$200 million worth of capital each year over the next five years to refurbish and

build the kind of fleet and infrastructure which is required to provide a realistic and effective rail passenger service.

● (1840)

We must have clarification whether rail passenger services are to have priority over freight cars. That is another issue which has still not been resolved. VIA really have no power and no authority. It plays second fiddle to the railway companies; it has no lever against the railways. It has to subscribe to an open-ended contract. It is a contract but at the end of the year it is renegotiable and additional charges which the railways incur are charged back to VIA Rail. It is really no way to run a railroad and the costing order has to be revised.

I urge the Minister of Transport and the Minister of Labour (Mr. Regan), who is sitting in the House at the present time and who is occasionally nodding in the affirmative, to clean that mess up before starting to perform wholesale surgery on the route structure, thereby denying the rights of many Canadians to passenger service in this country. I say this in the most objective and non-partisan fashion of which I am capable. I know it is an expensive service but we, as Canadians, have to make up our minds whether we want a rail passenger service in this country. Every indication I have seen, all the testimony I have read before the CTC, shows that Canadians by and large support, and will continue to support, the provision of an effective rail passenger service in this country. I urge the government to pay attention to this.

Another issue which has not been adequately dealt with in this session is the energy situation. We really have an energy crisis which is fueled by the suspension of the \$12 billion Cold Lake heavy oil plant as well as by the prospect of suspension of the Alsands project. The suspension of the Cold Lake plant can only be described as one of the most destructive decisions which has ever been made in the energy sector in Canada. I have to say this quite categorically and quite bluntly, Mr. Speaker. The blame for this has to be laid at the foot of the Liberal government in Ottawa.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mazankowski: It is well outlined in an editorial which appeared in the *Edmonton Journal* for Friday, July 10, 1981. Incidentally, Mr. Patrick O'Callaghan, the publisher, was at one time a pretty good Liberal. I think he has seen the destructive policies which have been levelled against western Canada and he certainly is very supportive of the current administration at the present time. That is not to say that he is not still a Liberal, but he has expressed a point of view which I must say to you, Mr. Speaker, is shared by most Canadians in western Canada. In an article entitled "Ottawa's failure", he writes:

Imperial Oil has shelved its Cold Lake heavy oil plant. And Alsands will probably suspend its plant north of Fort McMurray within two weeks. The responsibility for these tragic delays rests with the Liberals in Ottawa.

Canada desperately needs this oil. Conventional oil production will fall from 1.3 million barrels a day now to 710,000 barrels in 1985 and only 400,000 barrels in 1990. Canada has no hope of energy security without vast new oil