

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. Mulroney:** To deal with the first, and perhaps the most important inaccuracy of the Leader of the Opposition, VIA Rail was not destroyed today. VIA Rail was maintained today in a manner that Canadians can afford.

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

**Mr. Mulroney:** It is true, Mr. Speaker, that we do not have all of the answers in respect of the transportation needs of the 21st century. We have appointed a royal commission to deal not only with passenger transport but inter-modal transport, ranging from the infrastructure for airports, to train service, to passenger service involving buses and general transportation.

If this kind of thought and study had gone into these transportation problems at some time in the past, the Government of Canada could have avoided things like Mirabel.

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

**Mr. Mulroney:** Mr. Speaker, it is precisely to avoid the kinds of policies initiated on a whim by a Liberal government that we are going to seek the finest expertise to draw for Canada, a sophisticated nation entering the 21st century, a blueprint of our transportation needs to guide us all.

**Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte):** Mr. Speaker, on the question of VIA Rail, this Prime Minister is beginning to sound like the American officer during the Vietnam war who said, "We had to destroy the village in order to save it".

Today, the Prime Minister sent his messenger to the Press Gallery to announce that 2,761 VIA employees no longer have a job, to announce that three million Canadians who rode the rails in 1988 no longer have a train to ride and to announce that over half of VIA's network is being shut down—in short, the end of VIA Rail.

Why has the Prime Minister, who was mute about this matter during the last election, betrayed the disabled, the elderly, the youth, the poor, the small towns, and the regions of this country?

**Mr. Mulroney:** Mr. Speaker, I think our friends from the Liberal party are going to have to make up their minds. The Leader of the Opposition has just blamed me for saying too much about VIA Rail in the last election. Now this member says I was mute.

The fact of the matter is that the government has maintained a passenger link, and has initiated studies that we hope will provide for Canada's transportation needs well into the 21st century.

I think my hon. friend would be the first to agree that you cannot build a transportation system for the 21st century on a 19th century infrastructure. That is what we are trying to change.

**Mr. Tobin:** Mr. Speaker, it takes incredible gall to announce a royal commission into the mess that this government has made of the transportation infrastructure in Canada, but that is what this Prime Minister has done.

How can the Prime Minister expect Canadians to believe the government wants impartial advice when it has already, without consultation, butchered VIA Rail? Is not this royal commission nothing more than an autopsy of the Prime Minister's latest victim?

**Mr. Mulroney:** Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition says we killed VIA Rail. Then, all of a sudden, it is less mortal, we have butchered it. I am saying we have saved VIA Rail.

**Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. Only the Prime Minister of Canada would say that cutting something by 51 per cent is the way you go about saving it. That is Conservative logic.

I want to ask the Prime Minister this. The announcement today by the Minister of Transport means the loss of a minimum of 11,000 jobs, directly and indirectly, by VIA and all those communities that it has an impact on. It means the destruction of regional services in Atlantic Canada and elsewhere—a major reduction in national transportation service. Then we are going to have a multimillion dollar royal commission.

• (1430)

I want to ask the Prime Minister why the government did not announce its commission and listen to its results before it made up its mind about this wholesale destruction across the country.

**Mr. Mulroney:** Mr. Speaker, I suppose that when you strip the rhetoric away what the hon. member is asking me is in respect of the royal commission.