

*Supply*

The decision to abandon VIA Rail is not merely a transportation decision, it is an extension of a philosophic view about Canada. It is an idea about Canada that heretofore was foreign to the people of this nation. It is a view that reduces the country to a mere collection of pieces on a monopoly board. It attaches a value to citizenship that assigns the least value to it depending upon how far away one lives from the centre.

We in the Liberal Party cannot accept that view, that vision of Canada. Nor can we in this Party, this forward-looking, progressive, reformist Party, accept that Canada, a country among the nations of the world, must turn its back on the future. We cannot deny the opportunity to examine the technology that exists today to make this a modern and efficient transportation nation. We cannot accept that Japan and western Europe can develop high speed trains, make them productive, paying and efficient, serve their people and that Canada somehow is a backward nation incapable of developing that kind of transportation system.

• (1030)

We cannot accept that, Mr. Speaker. That is why we condemn the Government today. That is why we invite Canadians everywhere to understand the full implications of this decision and to battle this Government. They should make their voices heard to ensure that VIA Rail continues as a viable entity serving Canadians no matter where they live and to ensure that Canada moves into the 21st century in rail passenger service and not turn its back on the future and operate like a dinosaur lost in the forest of decades gone. This Minister of Transport is a dinosaur. This Government has abandoned the regions. This Government stands condemned before the people of Canada for a short-sighted, narrow, and punitive decision.

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

**Mr. Hovdebo:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the approach that the Member from Newfoundland took. Does he or his Party have a specific plan which they believe should be put into place for VIA in Canada?

**Mr. Tobin:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for his question. I think it is well known to all Members who have been involved in the work of the Standing Committee on Transport, and indeed all Members who have a

particular interest in transportation, that VIA Rail has worked very hard for the last number of years and has expended millions of dollars of funds to develop a plan for VIA Rail's future.

We know that the centre-piece of that plan is a determined examination of the whole concept of high speed trains. I think everybody in Canada, notwithstanding their political ideology, accepts that it is not an appropriate decision nor desire by anybody to see VIA Rail continue to operate at a loss of hundreds of millions of dollars per year. I do not believe the NDP supports that concept. The Liberal Party does not. The Government uses that notion as an excuse to destroy VIA Rail.

Those who are forward looking do not demand the *status quo*, that is the same low quality equipment, the same inappropriate service, and the very same routes being serviced in the very same way and manner forever. Nobody is looking for the *status quo* except the Minister. He tells us that it is the *status quo* or nothing. He makes the case that the *status quo* is not acceptable, the losses are not acceptable and therefore it is nothing.

He does not give the nation or VIA Rail an opportunity not to promote the *status quo* but to move beyond the *status quo* and into the present. We are actually operating a service that reflects the past. It reflects an ageing technology and ageing way of doing this rather than moving into the future.

The Member asked if I have a specific plan. Yes, Mr. Speaker, my plan and the plan of the liberal party, as well as that of all Members, should be to allow the people at Via Rail, who are in this business and who understand that the *status quo* was not acceptable to the Government and Canadians, to submit to the Minister as they are going to do in the next few weeks a plan that envisaged a role for VIA in the future and looked at the relevance of high speed trains. The plan should not be to throw money at it.

I happen to have a personal belief. I am willing to see VIA's concept challenged. If we in a country with technological ability and relative wealth are not prepared to invest in the future and to look very seriously at the concept of high speed trains, we may as well acknowledge today that we have no role and no ability to be in the rail passenger service and get out of it.