

Supply

take the train, and I do mean to keep on taking the train if they do not want more cuts in the future.

Mr. Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I note the threat implied in the Hon. Member's remarks when he said that users had better continue taking the train, or else they might be faced with further cuts.

I suggest the Hon. Member has just let the cat out of the bag. Ever since this Tory Government came to power, we have witnessed its unrelenting effort to completely destroy, our rail passenger service.

What this Government has never recognized is that the Cabinet had made up its mind to completely eliminate rail passenger service in this country. The Government of Canada wants to get out of it.

Although the Hon. Member made a fine speech, he could not help but express the Tory philosophy when towards at the end of his speech, he warned that other cuts were in the offing! We know that other cuts are forthcoming. So does the Quebec Premier. So do the mayors of the most important Quebec municipalities which will be affected by them, and especially the railway workers who are urging us to act now in order to put a stop to this frightening elimination of rail passenger service in Canada.

In this endeavour, the government was guilty of much foot dragging. I need not remind you that as soon as the Tories came to power, the first thing they did was to impose a freeze on all the orders which VIA Rail had placed for the purchase of new engines and passenger cars. Then, they ordered a freeze on all planned repair shops which were to be built throughout Canada to make it possible for VIA Rail to carry out repairs on its own cars and engines without having to rely on the CNR and the CPR which were charging very high repair and maintenance costs.

Finally, this government appointed the Horner Commission at a cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars to submit a report which expressly recommended to the government to give VIA Rail a definite mandate and additional subsidies. This Tory government chose to ignore the Horner Report because it went against its own views and policies. Not only they do not want to give VIA Rail more money, but they simply want VIA Rail to suffocate and give up the ghost. If they try, they will have to fight us head on, Mr. Speaker!

[*English*]

Mr. Ross Belsher (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, in listening to the debate this afternoon I have noted the suggestion that the standing committee held hearings against the wishes of the government. I can tell you that I have never heard anyone from the government say that the standing committee should not be holding hearings. The minister with whom I work has never once said that the standing committee should not hold hearings. It did this of its own free will because committees are masters of their own destiny.

• (1430)

It is unfortunate though that the standing committee in compiling its report and putting forth its suggestions was not a little more constructive in what it put forward. All it has said is that there should be a moratorium. Big deal, a moratorium. We are spending money like it is going out of style. We do not have the money to spend and that is what this program is all about.

Reducing subsidies to VIA Rail was a difficult decision to make and it was not done in haste. It strikes a balance between the transportation needs of our country and the fiscal realities which cannot be undermined. Fiscal responsibility is something that nobody on the opposition benches seems to want to address. They just keep saying: "Spend more money. Keep spending at the rate you are going and everything is going to be fine." It is not going to be fine.

The Canadian people have elected us to govern, and that is precisely what we are doing. I know it is going to be difficult for some people to adjust. Nevertheless, difficult decisions have to be made.

The new network will continue to link Canadians from Vancouver to Halifax. From listening to the members opposite you would think there is no more national transportation system. That is bunk. There will still be a train that you can get on in Halifax and you can get to Vancouver. It will maintain good connections between eastern and central Canada, and it will continue to serve the Quebec-Windsor corridor effectively, thereby providing Canadians from coast to coast with not only a national network but one that is affordable and sustainable. We will at last have something that we can build upon.