

Oral Questions

would be prepared to do is only to 2 per cent? The union has indicated publicly and privately time after time that it is interested in non-costly matters, working condition matters which substantially affect, if they are implemented, the equality of condition for women in the country.

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, with respect to the question of the equality of the condition of working women in the country, we indicated before the strike began that that is an issue we would very much like to sit down and negotiate at the bargaining table, which we have been unable to do. Clearly that is an area in which we would very much welcome an exchange of views between the union and ourselves. Otherwise, when the Leader of the New Democratic Party says that privately and publicly the union has taken positions which are very conciliatory or not costly—

Mr. Broadbent: What about the 2 per cent?

Mr. Johnston:—I would remind the House that the union position to date has been simply this: if the government accepts en bloc the recommendations of the chairman of the conciliation board, then they are prepared to sit down and negotiate the contract they would like to have. It has always been the conciliation board report plus—

Mr. Broadbent: No, it has not.

Mr. Johnston: That has always been the official position taken by the union.

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RAILWAYS

REQUEST FOR INTRODUCTION OF VIA RAIL LEGISLATION

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport. Is it still the intention of the government to cut back drastically rail passenger service in the country, affecting some 21 routes across Canada? If so, and given the fact that VIA Rail was never properly constituted or established under the parliamentary process, is it the minister's intention to bring to the Parliament of Canada a new VIA Rail act this autumn, as was recommended by the Standing Committee on Regulations and Other Statutory Instruments? If it is the intention of the minister to bring forth a new VIA Rail Canada act, would it not be reasonable for the minister and the government to defer any cutbacks in rail passenger services until such time as the mandate, the objectives, the whole regulatory mechanism and the route structure can be debated fully by Parliament?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, on the first subject, I am not in a position to comment because the decision of cabinet has not been made. On the other subject, that is the usefulness or necessity of having a VIA act, I am in full agreement with the views expressed by the hon. member and others.

The problem has always been with the agenda or the timetable of the House. In 1977 when VIA was created by an item in the estimates, presumably there were too many items on the agenda of the House. Last year I gave priority to the problem of the transportation of dangerous goods. This coming year, as the hon. member knows, we have the ports policy to bring up. We also have the independent air safety board to create. Thus, time is really the problem. Everyone agrees that VIA is entitled to legislation of its own as one of the major Crown corporations. I am committed to cabinet to bring forward a memorandum on the subject which might lead to that realization, whenever the time of the House permits.

● (1430)

REPORTED PLANS TO REDUCE SERVICE

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Madam Speaker, surely the minister realizes that the wholesale abandonment of several rail passenger services throughout Canada is a matter of very serious concern. I note that the minister neither confirmed nor denied that this matter was under active consideration. Could he undertake to tell the House whether, in fact, some 16 abandonments and five reductions in rail passenger services are currently under active cabinet consideration? If this decision is to be arrived at through government edict, could the minister explain how the citizens in the communities which will be affected will have an opportunity to voice their objections and concerns in a formal way?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, I have no intention of confirming or denying indirectly what I did not confirm or deny in a direct way.

POSSIBLE DATE OF GOVERNMENT DECISION

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): In order to clear the air, could the minister undertake to tell the House when a decision will be forthcoming, since it is quite obvious the matter is under active consideration?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, the hon. member is experienced in the art of being a minister. He also knows that this is unpredictable.

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CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS

TRANSPORTATION OF DANGEROUS GOODS THROUGH EDMONTON

Hon. Steven E. Paproski (Edmonton North): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport and it deals with regulations concerning hazardous and dangerous products. In view of the fact that there have been six or seven incidents concerning the transportation of hazardous and dangerous products in the Calder area in Edmonton along the 127th Avenue right-of-way, what game plan does the Canadian National Railways have to handle a major disaster—God