

Oral Questions

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

Mr. Speaker: I wish to draw the attention of the House to the presence in our gallery of His Royal Highness Prince Mohamed Bolkiah, Foreign Minister of the Sultanate of Brunei.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. Over the last two days the Prime Minister has demonstrated that he does not care about increased traffic on our highways, he does not care about the environment, the poor, the elderly or the thousands of people who are going to lose jobs.

I want to ask the self-appointed czar of the free market system in Canada about competition. The government's official document that we were asked to await, *Review '89*, states that air fares are going to increase by 30 per cent over the next 24 months and that the loss of rail passenger service is going to accelerate that trend toward higher air fares.

What steps, if any, does the Prime Minister intend to take to protect Canadians from being gouged by increasing air fares or if, indeed, the elimination of VIA Rail passenger service is part of the package to ensure that the privatization of Air Canada is a financial success?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the minister has already spoken and, as time goes on, will respond to all members in respect of various alternatives that would be analysed. Indeed, I think my hon. friend may even eventually agree that the royal commission that we are proposing on passenger service and transportation in the 21st century will turn out to be a very viable and important instrument for Canada.

I regret that my hon. friend has little use for my views on transportation and refers to me as a czar. Perhaps he would be interested in the views of someone closer to his ideology and views, a man with a great deal of expertise in this area who sat as Minister of Transport in the Liberal government.

This morning Jean-Luc Pepin, interviewed on *Morningside*, said: "But the truth of the matter is that we have seen four revolutions since the advent of railways: the revolution of the automobile, the revolution of the bus, the revolution of the plane, and the revolution of electronics. There is no way we could have kept the railway system we had in the 19th century, no way at all. We had to adjust. That's what we are doing now".

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Tobin: Mr. Speaker, with the greatest of respect to the Prime Minister and his new found friend, Mr. Pepin, we rejected that gentleman's views in 1982, 1983, and we reject them now.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Dick: You didn't reject them in 1982-83.

Mr. McDermid: Explain.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Tobin: The very last paragraph of the government's own long awaited official document says: "Passenger rail is one of the safest modes of travel. If passenger rail is eliminated most travellers will be diverted to the automobile and fatalities will increase".

Why is the Prime Minister, according to the government's own estimates, dumping 2.7 million Canadians who rode the rails in 1988 on to the highways, highways that are already congested, dangerous, and too often fatal.

Mr. Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, I think that the very distinguished Minister of Transport has responded quite fully, already, to many of the concerns raised by my hon. friend and in point of fact has indicated a series of inquiries and initiatives that will define for Canada the kind of transport policy that we need and that my hon. friend seeks for the citizens of his province and for Canada.

Mr. Tobin: We don't have a train in Newfoundland any more, Brian, thanks to you.

Mr. Mulroney: My hon. friend mentions Newfoundland and the passenger service. I notice that he was quick to repudiate a very distinguished member of his party, Mr. Pepin, a former minister of the Crown.