

*Oral Questions*

kind of irresponsible behaviour on the part of a Crown corporation is no longer tolerable? Will he make an arrangement with the CNR to have it cancel the lay-offs and to continue to employ these many workers at doing the great amount of work waiting to be done?

People could be working at repairing existing equipment, or in building the Transcontinental equipment that the minister promised when he announced his ill-conceived VIA cutbacks last fall. There is no shortage of work, Madam Speaker. Why is the Minister of Transport not making that kind of arrangement with Canadian National Railways?

[Translation]

**Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport):** Madam Speaker, I am sure that if I did make that kind of decision, namely, if every day, as soon as I got to the office in the morning, I gave instructions to Air Canada, the CN and other Crown corporations for which I am responsible, then several members of this House would be the first to criticize me for doing so. The role of the minister, as far as Crown corporations are concerned, is to indicate general policy guidelines and not to try to butt into the day to day activities of these corporations. Of course I regret the situation that led to these lay-offs as much as the hon. member, but I would like to point out that as a result of unemployment insurance and collective agreements, these employees will, in most cases, be receiving up to 80 per cent of their salary during the lay-off period.

[English]

**Mr. Blaikie:** Madam Speaker, a lay-off of 1,200 people in one shop is not day to day activity, and the minister did not mind butting into VIA Rail when he saw fit to tear the passenger rail system apart.

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

**Mr. Blaikie:** All those who work for the railway or those who are otherwise interested in the future of transportation in this country will not soon forget this particular Minister of Transport.

## NOTIFICATION OF UNIONS

**Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill):** Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Minister of Transport. Does the minister approve of the fact that the trade unions concerned in these lay-offs had to hear about them from the local radio news? If he does approve, are we to understand that the government has now instructed Crown corporations to treat trade unions with the same contempt as the Liberals treat Parliament?

**Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport):** Madam Speaker, because I have already answered the rest of the question, I simply want to make a distinction between the

decision which the government made concerning VIA, which was a policy decision relating to the amount of money, the amount of subsidy the Government of Canada was willing to give VIA and the extent of the losses which could be sustained, and the policy concerning how many people should be laid off over what period of time which, in my view, relates to the daily operation of a Crown corporation.

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## PIPELINES

## BUILDING OF NATURAL GAS PIPELINE TO ATLANTIC PROVINCES

**Mr. Bob Corbett (Fundy-Royal):** Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister and to assist him, my constituency is Fundy-Royal. The Prime Minister will recall that he spoke to the Board of Trade in Halifax, Nova Scotia. During the course of that discussion he stated:

—that a Liberal government will take immediate action—

The Prime Minister said there would be immediate action.

—to ensure the full co-operation of all parties in the construction of a natural gas pipeline to Quebec City and the maritimes.

He went on to say that the gas pipeline would be reversible. He said that in January, 1980, nearly two and one half years ago.

Will the Prime Minister now tell people in Atlantic Canada his interpretation of the words "immediate action"? Will he instruct the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources to take action now, forthwith, immediately, right away, instantly, to provide, without delay, a schedule for the natural gas pipeline to cross the St. Lawrence River into the Atlantic provinces and reinforce the Prime Minister's determination to have it reversible?

**Mr. Lawrence:** As soon as possible!

[Translation]

**Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources):** Madam Speaker, I may refer the hon. member to the decisions handed down by the National Energy Board and confirmed by the Government of Canada, which include a schedule that is public knowledge. There has been some delay in getting the program started in Quebec, for all sorts of reasons connected with labour relations issues and obtaining the approval of the provincial government. We expect the gas pipeline to reach Trois-Rivières this fall and Quebec City some time next spring in 1983.

[English]

**Mr. Corbett:** Madam Speaker, it is quite obvious, upon examining the record, that the Prime Minister's pledge that the gas pipeline would go into the Atlantic provinces was as hollow as his pledge not to increase the price of gasoline.