

Adjournment Debate

tion, the groups, the individuals or any other Hon. Member to ensure that we can resolve the situation to the satisfaction of everyone involved.

• (1820)

VIA RAIL—PC TASK FORCE REPORT/REQUEST FOR
MINISTERIAL COMMITMENT

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay—Atikokan): Mr. Speaker, I rise to express dissatisfaction with the answer given to me in the House on April 5 of this year by the Minister of Transport (Mr. Bouchard) in regard to VIA Rail. The date is important since it is prior to the now infamous Budget which very clearly was designed to lead to the inevitable destruction of VIA Rail as the provider of passenger rail service in Canada.

I would like first to refer to the question that I put to the Minister and the answer that I received. I told the Minister of Transport:

When the Liberals tried to cut the deficit by taking apart VIA Rail, just like this Government appears to be set on doing, the now Deputy Prime Minister took a PC Task Force across this country in defence of VIA Rail. Its report entitled "The Last Straw" concluded that the federal Government has a responsibility to ensure that rail passenger services in Canada be retained, modernized, and expanded as an important part of our national transportation system.

If my memory serves me correctly the Conservative Party ran on that as part of its platform plank in 1984. I will give the Party credit for this, immediately after it was elected it did reinstate services which had been cut by the former Liberal Government. However, that is where the situation ends.

I asked the Minister on April 5 if the Government would live up to its report and its promises as stated in 1984 by ensuring that VIA will not only receive the funds necessary to maintain its existing operations but funds to modernize its operations.

The Minister stated:

The answer was that any decision concerning VIA Rail or any other Crown corporation for that matter will be made in due time.

Due time came along fairly soon with the Budget. The Budget indicated that there would be a reduction in the level of subsidy to VIA Rail. In fact, it turns out that that reduction has a value of approximately \$1.2 billion over the next five years. Depending on who one talks to that reduction could have a number of results.

The worst case scenario is that because of the ever decreasing dollars available from the federal coffers that it will not be five years from now that VIA as we know it as a national passenger rail system will cease to exist but it might be this fall. I am aware that on June 15 VIA Rail will increase its prices for every passenger, whether that be a day coach passenger, an overnight passenger, or what have you, by 10 per cent. The last time prices were raised by 10 per cent VIA Rail lost in excess of 700,000 passengers. VIA Rail knows this. The Government knows this. I am sure that is part and parcel of the over-all plan for the destruction of VIA Rail.

The Government has said it will protect nine routes where the people who live along those routes have no other alternative in terms of transportation. They are captive to rail. However, when it comes down to that final year, when there will be only \$250 million of subsidy available to VIA, many of us believe that all that it will be able to afford to operate will be those nine routes. That means no Atlantic, no Transcontinental and that the run from Jasper to Vancouver will be gone from the national system.

• (1825)

It may mean that the corridor, Windsor, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Quebec City is also gone. In addition, there is the collective agreement reality between VIA Rail and some of its employees. That makes the cost of shutting down the system extremely expensive as a means of protecting the workers, who will sort of feel like they were employees of CN Route, as they have been transferred over from CN to VIA, or CP to VIA, and who now find after a very few years that their jobs are going out the window or have been dropped off at the end of the—I would say caboose, but that is gone too.

This Government has made a conscious decision to eliminate rail passenger services as a national system. It is talking about provincialization. I hope there is no province that says yes.

I wrote to the Premiers right after the budget decision and said: "If you do that then you are falling into the trap once again of allowing the federal Government to offload national programs and put them to the provinces where the provincial taxpayers have to pay the tab."