

Oral Questions

Mr. Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, just for the record, I want to advise my friend who also has roots in eastern Nova Scotia that I would contest and be happy to discuss with her some of the figures that she has just used.

However, in fairness, I think should point out that on February 24, 1986 the government, in a statement by the then Minister of Transport, said: "At the same time the government is committed to a major reduction of subsidy payments for VIA Rail. Federal funding will be reduced to \$400 million by 1989." The Minister then went on: "Corridor or regional services may be discontinued if they fail to meet financial performance targets for any two consecutive years after December 31, 1986. Trans-continental services may be cut to three times a week if they fail to meet 60 per cent of specific costs for any two consecutive years after December 31".

The government did put out to my hon. friend and colleagues in the House of Commons very substantial advance warning of our intentions and of our obligations. The figures that my hon. friend uses to justify her argument are, may I respectfully say, quite wrong. The figures that the minister has produced today justify the decisions announced.

Mr. Guy H. Arseneault (Restigouche): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government has decimated the region of Campbellton, New Brunswick with its destructive rail transportation policy and is now removing all local lines in New Brunswick.

[*Translation*]

My question is directed to the Prime Minister. Why doesn't the Prime Minister ask the Minister of Transport to declare a moratorium on all service cuts at VIA Rail, pending the report of his royal commission of inquiry? Or is this commission just a ploy to deceive Canadians?

Mr. Bouchard (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, this morning I thought the Liberal Party would have understood the purpose of this royal commission of inquiry. VIA Rail is a problem that costs a corporation \$900 million, a problem that needs an additional \$250 million. These are the kinds of figures Canadians understand and these are the figures Canadians want us to change.

Mr. Speaker, the VIA Rail decision deals with a corporation that is inefficient, that does not work and that costs too much.

Mr. Speaker, that being said, in the years to come, beyond the year 2000, we must be able to integrate our transportation network in this country. We must know how much we are going to invest in the railways in highway transportation and in the air and marine transport modes. If I followed the example set by the Liberal Party for 20 years, 50 years from now we would still be spending money piecemeal on transport.

[*English*]

Mr. George S. Rideout (Moncton): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport. The employees who work for VIA Rail are not numbers, not dollar signs, not person-years on a balance sheet. The ripple effect of the VIA job cuts will hit every home in the ridings of Moncton and Beausejour. It is nonsense to suggest that CN and CP were not making a huge profit on VIA's utilization of their lines and that profit is now going to be lost.

My question for the minister is as follows: Is the next shoe to fall the complete elimination of CN in Atlantic Canada?

Mr. Bouchard (Roberval): Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. The decision which has been made today about VIA Rail does not involve CN and CP.

I want to correct something here today that people on the other side use all the time. In 1983 the money that VIA had to pay to CN and CP was 65 per cent of the budget, but with the good policy of the Deputy Prime Minister today this money is 15 per cent.

Ms. Lynn Hunter (Saanich—Gulf Islands): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport.

British Columbia is severely affected by the cuts to VIA Rail. The Super Continental has been reduced to three times weekly. The Canadian has been done away with. On Vancouver Island the Esquimalt and Nanaimo run has been completely eliminated. These measures demonstrate this government's complete contempt for the regions of Canada. Passenger service on Vancouver Island was a condition of B.C.'s entry into Confederation.

Is this government serving notice to the people of Vancouver Island that they are no longer welcome in Confederation?