

Supply

whether he would now consider going back to Trans-Consortium and saying yes, that the government will look at that kind of private sector involvement.

The final question, again coming from the report and the testimony, was the whole matter of the protected routes. We can quibble on the figures, whether it is \$45 million or \$50 million or whatever, but in terms of a principle, would the minister agree with the thought that came through the committee that the funding for the public good should not be part of his budget but should come from general government financing so that it does not distort VIA's books? I would like some very serious answers to those four serious questions.

Mr. Bouchard (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, I think the questions are good and I will try to do my best to give what I consider my best answers.

I want to say, first, that I think it is a big temptation to believe that we can just with our hands make a decision to reduce the interest rate. I know something though.

Mr. Benjamin: Did it before?

Mr. Bouchard (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, the member from Regina—Lumsden was there at the time when Canadians were so upset about the rate of inflation, 12 and 13 per cent. Canadians would perhaps have agreed at the time to have a 12 per cent interest rate but with a 4 or 5 per cent inflation rate, as we have today. I believe the policy of the Minister of Finance is good at a time when he can control the inflation. I do not believe he could serve Canadians better, if the inflation rate would be what it was at the time.

The member asks about a change to a royal commission. I think my friend will understand that the three other questions depend upon the answer we give to the first. You will understand what I mean. The mandate of the royal commission has been determined in a way that we could answer the basic question of integration of transportation modes for the year 2000. If there is any proposal in the interim report in one and a half years at that time it will be possible to determine whether we can immediately answer a few questions.

The mandate of the commission has not been tailored with regard to VIA Rail. It has been determined with

regard to all transportation modes and it does not intend to answer, specifically, the problem of VIA Rail.

On the question of VIA Rail, I have been told by the Mayor of Quebec that it was euthanasia because we were killing the system.

I am not that pessimistic. We need, though, to have major surgery. We are keeping the system alive. The Premier of Ontario said this morning that his government is working with the province of Quebec to determine new technology, high speed trains, and we are fully supportive of that initiative. But first we have to look at the commission in the broad perspective of all transportation. For that reason we could not reduce the mandate to just VIA Rail and look at a practical problem which perhaps will be answered after the commission makes its report. I am one of those who believe that VIA Rail deserves to have its own legislation to be able to manage differently than it does so far. We have asked a commission to determine the future of transportation. In a year and a half we will see exactly what direction it believes we should take with all transportation, including VIA Rail. At the time, I suppose, if the commission considers the viability of VIA Rail and it makes a proposal on the legislation we will be able to determine the legislation, which corresponds to the new reality. With the very heavy agenda that we have, the legislation will not be ready before a year and a half anyhow. In the meantime, I believe we could perhaps miss out on the competence of the commission.

• (1320)

The two last questions refer to the question of new cars. Even if we want to go to the Consolidated Fund or the Department of Finance and so on, management of the deficit is in the way. If you take \$100 million, it will be the same money that I would need for a moratorium. I mean that we would need to pay for that.

You ask why not give the private sector the capacity to lease. Once again I refer to the commission. If it makes a recommendation of this kind, we will consider the proposal as I believe it should be done. It is the same for the protected routes. First, for those remote routes, my friend knows that I want to review them. We give the same example of Jasper-Prince Rupert which costs \$483 for one ticket. I wonder if there isn't a cheaper mode of transportation. Sometimes we wonder if it wouldn't be cheaper to use a helicopter, because at \$483 a ticket I