

Supply

you, Sir, in a very non-partisan way merely put the motion.

What the motion states is:

That this House condemns the Government for its short-sighted and punitive policies that are designed to eliminate passenger rail services in Canada despite the essential nature of the services to the development of communities in all regions of the country.

We bring this motion to the attention of the House today because the Government of Canada has embarked upon a policy, a short-sighted policy, that not only will deny in the short term the people of Canada a rail passenger service, which in itself is important and devastating for the communities to be affected but, more fundamentally, it is denying Canadians as we move into the 1990s and the year 2000 the future.

Why do I say that? We have a Government which through an arbitrary decision contained in the federal Budget, made a decision to cut back substantially on the amount of money provided to VIA Rail to provide rail passenger service in Canada. The Minister of Transport (Mr. Bouchard) is a Minister—let no one be fooled—who is no fool. I want to vouch for the fact that the Minister of Transport is a reasonably intelligent individual. He is a reasonably political individual. He is someone who understands the consequences of his actions. He is not a mere puppet in the hands of the bureaucrats, completely without any sense or understanding of the consequences of his actions.

Yet we have the same Minister standing in his place in the House day after day, in committee, before the cameras and before the public saying: "We are not telling VIA Rail what to do. We are not telling it what service it should provide. We are not telling it what services it should cut. We are merely telling VIA it has no money. The rest is up to them". "I want to assure you", says this Minister with his most baleful, honest and sincere look, "the Government of Canada has not targeted parts of this country, such as Atlantic Canada. We have not abandoned the West. We have not shattered our commitments to those rural communities all across this land. We are merely telling VIA Rail that it has \$500 million less than it used to have. The responsibility for how it lives within that new budget is its problem, not mine, not ours".

For a reasonably heretofore described intelligent, reasonably aware, reasonably engaging Minister of the Crown to make that kind of foolhardy proposition is an insult to the intelligence of Canadians. Let it be clearly said today that it is not some mindless, faceless group of bureaucrats in some long lost corporation occupying the top floor of some glass and steel ivory tower called VIA Rail that is making the decision to abandon rural Canada. It is the Government of Canada and, specifically, the Minister of Transport who is responsible for the actions that are being taken today. Let no one be fooled.

What exactly is involved in this decision by the Government? So it is on the record and so Canadians know what we are talking about, it is the elimination of some 22 routes. The routes west are Montreal-Sudbury, Toronto-Winnipeg-Calgary, Winnipeg-Edmonton, Victoria-Kootenay, in Quebec, Chaleurs-Gaspé, Quebec-Mont Joli, Montreal-Sherbrooke, North Shore and in Ontario, Kingston-Toronto, Toronto-Sarnia, Toronto-Niagara, Toronto-London, Toronto-Havelock, Toronto-North Bay, and Cochrane-Kapuskasing. The Atlantic routes are Halifax-Dartmouth, Halifax-Montreal, Halifax-Sydney, Halifax-Saint John, Moncton-Campbellton, Moncton-Edmundston and Moncton-Charlottetown. Then there is Calgary-Vancouver, Edmonton-Vancouver, the corridor between Toronto and Montreal, Quebec-Montreal-Hervey, western Winnipeg and Winnipeg-The Pas. Only six of the nine remaining remote routes were left untouched. Only one route was increased. Of 35 routes, potentially 22 are to be eliminated. Six are to be reduced. That is the consequence of the decision taken by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) in his Budget.

I began my remarks by saying that the Government of Canada is not just taking a decision that fundamentally alters one of the important modes of transportation in this country and abandons communities, in particular, in rural parts of Canada, but that the Government is also denying the future to Canadians. I said that because the Minister of Transport knows, as does the Minister of Finance, that VIA Rail under its former President, Denis deBellevil, a President who was fired, eliminated, vaporized, disposed of by the Minister of Transport, was putting together, along with his officials and with the