

Private Members' Business

remain viable if it sells land and salvageable steel rails for what is commonly called a "nominal sum." Too often, we associate the concept of "nominal sum" with the amount of \$1, instead of at least considering net salvage value which can amount to millions of dollars.

It is therefore not necessary for the government to authorize CN to sell the Chapais subdivision. CN is ready to sell the line at a price equivalent to the value of the land and the net salvage value of the track facilities. It has all the necessary authority for this.

Madam Speaker, if I may, I will briefly talk about the second part of the motion, that is to obtain a guarantee that CN will maintain the neighbouring CRAN subdivision, and make sure that it is integrated in such way as to promote mining and logging in the region.

Maybe I should apologize, but I do not understand the meaning of the word "integration" in this context, and neither do the officials of Transport Canada. The CRAN subdivision is a side track to and from transfer points to lines with much heavier traffic. In order to be operated properly and safely, the track and the related infrastructure must be properly integrated.

As for the maintenance of the CRAN subdivision, CN is seeing to it. CN also uses this track for rail traffic within the region. Railway activities and maintenance work done by CN in the CRAN subdivision are regulated by the government and supervised by railway safety inspectors designated by the minister.

In conclusion, I want to insist on the fact that existing statutory provisions and policies allow for the purchase of the CN's Chapais subdivision. CN wants to sell the line. As for the CRAN subdivision, it is operated by CN according to operation and maintenance standards approved by the federal government under the Railway Safety Act.

• (1400)

For all these reasons, I cannot support the motion.

Mr. Maurice Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead): Madam Speaker, I am very disappointed by the answer from the government member to the motion of the hon. member for Roberval asking for the maintenance of some railroad lines in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. When you listen to the government member, we would almost think we were hearing CN officials. I imagine that the member's reply was prepared by CN officials, because what we just heard is almost exactly the same as the letters sent in recent years by CN to all concerned, regarding this line.

The problem with this government is its lack of sensitivity to regional development and its lack of vision when it comes to

public policies. This comment has been made before, but this is yet another prime example of this shortcoming. The Liberals are merely repeating the mistakes of the previous Conservative government which they so vehemently criticized for years in the House and elsewhere, insisting all along that it be more compassionate and more sensitive to the regions.

This is a good example where residents of a region, in this particular case Lac-Saint-Jean and Chibougamau, are not asking for subsidies. They are not begging to get money from the government in order to maintain and preserve their economic development. If the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands gives me a few moments, I will convince him of the merits of this motion.

People from Chibougamau—Chapais and from Lac-Saint-Jean are merely asking that we respect their desire to look after their own economic development in the years to come.

In his reply, the Liberal member used CN figures when he said that, in recent years, the line had been used once by Hydro-Quebec to transport transformers.

The hon. member for Roberval spent 20 minutes explaining why rail service must be maintained in this region, and he pointed out that, nowadays, given the crisis in the mining industry, the rail line is not being used as much as it would be if there were a boom in mining development. Who knows, in a week, a year or two years from now, the mining industry may enjoy an incredible boom. What would happen then, Madam Speaker, if we decide now to dismantle the rail lines and get rid of this infrastructure? The taxpayers will have to reach into their pockets once again to rebuild roads or rail lines in order to further the economic development of their region.

In his speech, the hon. member for Roberval raised another important issue to which I want to come back, and that is the ownership of this rail line.

• (1405)

This rail line does not belong to the private sector but to a public institution called Canadian National. As my colleague has mentioned, for many decades, in fact for more than a century, Quebecers and all Canadians as well were involved in financing and maintaining this service in all regions of Canada. Therefore, they are the real owners. This rail line does not belong to the President of Canadian National or to officials in the Department of Transport. It belongs to the citizens who paid for it over and over again.

If we had to keep in mind only this criterion, which is the immediate cost effectiveness of a rail line, what would happen to the rail lines in western Canada which get hundreds of millions of dollars in subsidies for grain transportation? As my colleague pointed out, we, in the Bloc, are not opposed to