

So even this committee of which, I repeat, the majority of the members belong to the government, doubt the figures of the government.

In its conclusion, the committee can only come to one conclusion:

—VIA never had a chance in the beginning.

It used a beautiful term, an emphatic term but the meaning conveyed is very sad for the country. It was “stillborn”. It goes on:

The current evidence has not convinced the Committee that the salvation of VIA is at hand as a result of the new Government plan.

On this basis, when Canadians hear these very specific recommendations coming from this committee, they will immediately be convinced, as we have already felt from their submissions to us through petitions, that they are truly against the government plan.

This government is challenged. We will see whether it can prove sensitive and responsive to the sentiments of the vast majority of Canadians, whether it can prove sensitive and responsive to the sentiments of the representatives of Canadians, the members of Parliament reflected in this standing committee of this House, the majority members of which come from the government side. The very first recommendation of the standing committee is:

That the Government declare a moratorium on its announced service cuts to VIA Rail that are to become effective January 15, 1990.

The committee would like an interim report from the royal commission.

• (1540)

In conclusion, I think the standing committee has provided us with very compelling and persuasive arguments that we should have at the very least a moratorium on the government plan. The committee has not asked for a permanent change of the government plan. The committee has only asked that there be a temporary cessation so that the royal commission could proceed with its study. When it recommends in the future that not be too late, but this government plan could make such future recommendations impossible. The standing committee is trying to tell us to give VIA Rail a chance. If there is a vision in this country for all Canadians we

should exercise the political will. If there is a political will we can discover the political way.

[Translation]

Mr. Charles A. Langlois (Manicouagan): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that you recognized me. I might add that the few observations I want to make will probably not take the ten minutes allocated to me.

I simply want to take a few minutes of the time of the House to shed some light on the economic situation of VIA Rail resulting from the budget allocated to the corporation by the government of Canada. I also want to say a few words concerning the number of Canadians who travel with VIA Rail.

Mr. Speaker, I attended most of the transport committee hearings. Sure enough, many people, many organizations and many municipal spokesmen appeared before the committee to say that the funds earmarked for VIA Rail should not be reduced, yet not one of them was able to suggest a mechanism which the federal government might use to continue paying grants to cover the operating costs of VIA Rail.

Mr. Speaker, for some time now people have been saying that the government's decision to slash VIA Rail funding comes at a time when ever more people travel by train and the corporation is beginning to see better days ahead. Reality does not lend credence to such statements, Mr. Speaker. As my colleague the Hon. Member for Roberval (Mr. Bouchard) has been saying so many times in recent months, Canadian taxpayers can no longer afford to give VIA Rail ever larger grants at a time when the corporation's productivity is declining. I would emphasize, Mr. Speaker, that the government has been subsidizing VIA Rail's operating costs.

Need I recall that last year these grants rose to \$641 million, an unprecedented amount which, I repeat, was spent to cover the operating deficit of VIA Rail. Mr. Speaker, this kind of money amounts on average to \$100 for each passenger boarding a train, that is \$100 paid by the Canadian taxpayers every time a passenger climbs aboard a train. Another factor which cannot be ignored is that since 1977 VIA Rail has gobbled up more than \$5 billion of the taxpayer's money, including over \$1 billion in capital expenditures to give VIA Rail a chance to make a go of it. Mr. Speaker, we ought to realize that the billion dollars which was paid to VIA Rail to improve its