

# Gov't cooked the books on buses, NDP claims

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Sun Victoria Bureau  
VICTORIA — The provincial government was accused Thursday of "cooking the books" to justify the planned merger of Pacific Stage Lines with Vancouver Island Coach Lines.

The charge was made by New Democratic Party transit critic Charles Barber, who said the proposed merger will result in deterioration of public transit service in the province.

Meanwhile, the Amalgamated Transit Union said the government is studying the possibility of also selling off its Fraser Valley bus runs and of no longer carrying buses on B.C. Ferries.

The bus lines merger, which will create a new company called Pacific Coach Lines, was announced by Municipal Affairs Minister Hugh Curtis earlier this week.

Barber (Victoria) said in a statement he does not believe the Social Credit government's claims that the two companies have consistently lost money on their own.

"There is good reason to believe that the government has cooked the books," Barber said.

He suggested that the government has employed "bookkeeping tricks to make the bus lines look as bad as possible."

Barber's statement echoed a charge Wednesday by an ATU member that the government tried to justify the merger and the sale of some bus services for purely political reasons.

Gentry Hudson told the Victoria Labor Council the government's arguments in support of the move are specious, a hoax and a sham.

"Socred logic that attacks these operations as losers on the one hand and sells them as winners on the other is simply fraudulent," Barber said.

He said an independent audit of the two companies should be made before the operations are sold.

He also reacted with skepticism to claims by Curtis that 147 employees who will no longer be need-

public works ministry believed Socred promises that they would be absorbed elsewhere in the system.

"Two demonstrations later, they now realize the Socreds have betrayed that promise," Barber said.

Curtis' announcement said the new firm would divest itself of its charter, sightseeing and airport service operations. He said the two lines had been losing \$8 million a year.

Hudson said the union maintains that the special services such as charter and sightseeing are money-making operations and, by cutting them off, the government is forcing municipalities to subsidize the money-losing part of the bus systems without

getting any revenue back.

In Vancouver, ATU business agent Al Ashton said in an interview the union fears a further loss of 50 or more jobs if the government sells Pacific Stage Lines' Fraser Valley runs between Vancouver and Haney, Mission, Chilliwack, Abbotsford and Hope.

Ashton said he will continue meetings with officials of two other unions affected by the merger, the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers, which represents about 150 Vancouver Island employees, and the Office and Technical Employees' Union, representing Pacific Stage Lines office workers.