



Mulcair couched his remarks in repeated expressions of compassion for those affected, and insisted that questions needed to be answered, for no one as much as for those same victing and their families.

This was enough for many members of the national media to abandon any question of whether Harper or his cuts could have contributed to the accident, and spend the day waxir eloquent on the inappropriate, crass and politically motivated nature of the NDP leader's comments.

Former Liberal leader Bob Rae took the opportunity to make Mulcair's "politically motivated" questions a politically motivated story, tweeting: 'Tom Mulcair blaming Harper for the traged in Lac Megantic is a new low, and as you know, I'm no fan of Mr Harper's politics.'

## Rail oversight slammed in 2007

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Behind the bickering over the latest rour of cuts to railroad regulation and safety inspections, however, is a broader issue. In 1999 the Liberal government of the day deregulated Canada's railroads by amending the Railway Safety Act to implement Safety Management Systems (SMS). This change eliminated the role of Transport Canada in the oversight of railroads, and passed the onus onto the individual companies to regulate themselves.

A 2007 report from the Canada Safety Council raised the alarm about the dangers of this approach and called Canada's railway network a disaster waiting to

happen, arguing that the government should return oversight to Transport Canada.

Deregulation "allows rail companies to regulate themselves, removing the federal government's ability to protect Canadians and their environment, and allowing the industry to hide critical safety information from the public."

The report found major safety issues and frequent derailments, and even spills of oil and other hazardous substances, were common. One rail company, believed to be CN, was singled out for having "a truly dismal safety record."

The report's dire warning that the status quo would lead to disaster seems early prescient in » CCTV footage of randy couples on metro lands on Lac-Mégantic, and as opposition parties try to hang blame for the disaster on a cut of \$3.1 million, the better question remains unasked: is deregulation, and its attendant lack of oversight, the true culprit?

This report is far from a lone voice in the wilderness; as a release by environmental advocacy group Greenpeace points out, there have been many warnings, especially when it comes to transporting oil.

"The Federal government's own safety officials told them nine years ago that 80 per cent of the rail tanker fleet in Canada is unsafe for carrying oil. The general type of rail car used to move oil in Canada was flagged by the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) as having a "high incidence of tank failures during accidents" and by the Canadian Transportati Safety Board as prone "to release product at derailment and impact".

## Dire warnings ignored

In fact, as recently as June of this year, in an article titled "Tories take wait-and-see approa as TSB probe calls for train safety overhaul," the Globe and Mail reported on a Transportation Safety Board report which called for stricter regulation and more safety measures in the wa of a Via Rail derailment which killed three and injured dozens.



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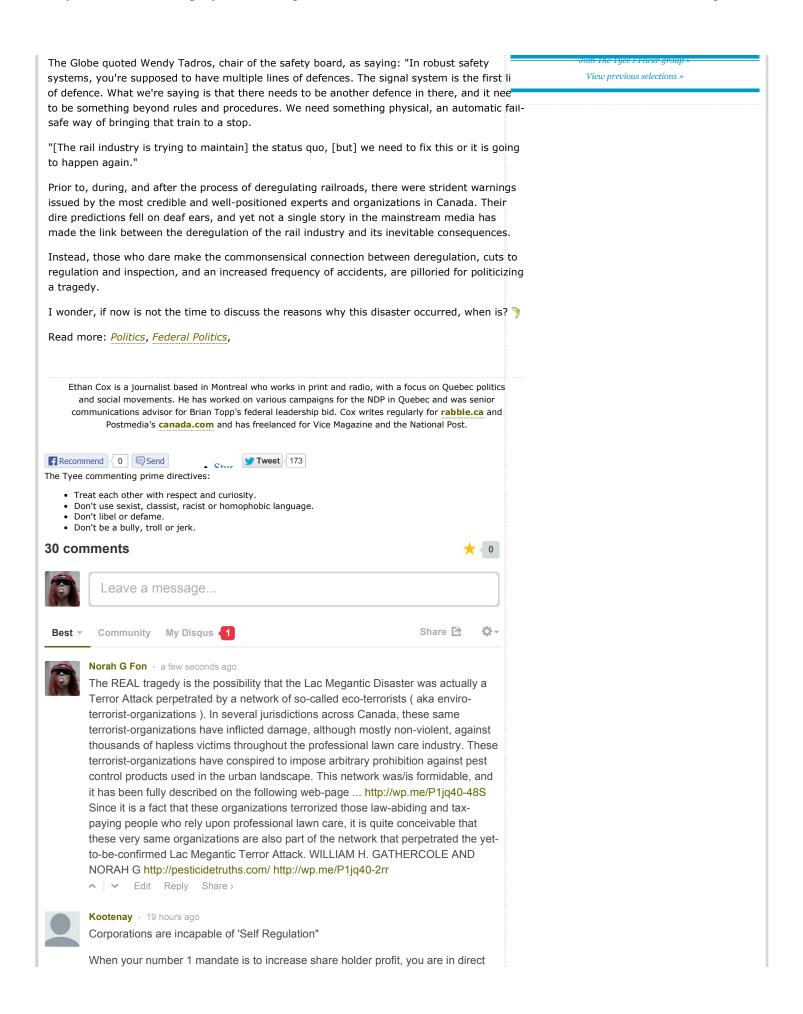
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