

Statements by Ministers

I now wish to deal with the statistical information that was contained within the Minister's statement. The statistics with respect to deaths and injuries were sort of read into the record almost in the same way as an insurance salesman would explain a rate structure. It is good that the Minister can find some solace in declining accident rates and other matters which are contained in the statement. I do not think that we should develop a safety strategy around the statistics alone. It is very important that we recognize the reality of the current situation.

The Minister knows full well that there are in fact problems in all modes of transportation which can and do have an affect on safety. I submit that lay-offs in the rail industry by both major rail companies result in questions being asked about the standards of safety the remaining employees are able to maintain. Without going into great detail, the example I would give is that I have had it reported to me on a number of occasions, and I have no reason to doubt this, that as a result of the reduction in manpower there is not the kind of inspection taking place of bulk rail vehicles in the Sarnia area that is necessary. I am told that the inspections which should be undertaken of all the various aspects for safety purposes is not taking place now because there are fewer employees and therefore the movement is more frequent in proportion. I am told that the actual physical inspection requirements are just not being met. I submit that can and will result at some point in time in a major accident. It may not result in a derailment, and one hopes that it will not. However, at some point somewhere between Sarnia and Toronto there will be a major leak develop in a rail carrier. I ask the Minister to pay particular attention to this point.

I also suggest to the Minister that we in this House know of the problems respecting security staffing at airports. The Minister has paid recognition to that fact and has made additional moneys available. It boggles the mind, if I can put it that way, when one thinks about how we provide the security. We pay people the minimum wage and, yes, we provide additional training to them. However, we know that staff turnover runs at about 10 per cent a month. This means that at the end of the year the people who started at the beginning of the year are no longer there. If I might be allowed to say this, the process is really in the hands of amateurs. Not only is it in the hands of amateurs when it comes to the actual people on the job, no doubt doing the best they can with an adequate pay scale and adequate conditions, but it is a little unusual when one finds that a group of people who have no licence, no assets, no insurance and no bonding can apply and get a \$2.5 million security contract for an airport. We wonder if that is the standard of safety we are prepared to accept.

● (1240)

As the Minister well knows, this has happened. A contract was let to people who were related to the industry through marriage, if I recall correctly. However, the company that submitted the tender proposal, as far as I am aware—and the

Minister can respond to this—was merely a shell of a company. When the company got the contract, it was a shell operation, and clearly it became somewhat more than a shell after the contract was granted on May 6 of this year to Metropol Airport Security Ltd. I do worry that that might occur again.

I would suggest that in my judgment security at airports has to be professionalized if it is to be satisfactory. I suggest to the Minister that he make sure that that occurs. In this day and age, there is more likelihood of an incident at an airport than there has been at any time in history. I would submit that there is more likelihood of an incident at an airport than there is on the streets. We pay, train and provide for our own protection on the streets through police forces with members who are adequately and properly trained; yet at an airport we provide security people who, quite bluntly speaking, are simply passing through the system. I do not think that that is enough, and I think the Government probably shares that view. I would ask the Government to take a serious look at that matter.

I thought the Minister might have announced today further review of a decision taken with regard to lighthouses. We know that the Government has directed that lighthouses will now be operated on an unmanned basis without any personnel on site. In other words, lighthouses have been computerized. I suggest that the role of the lighthouse keeper is a far larger role than one of simply turning lights off and on, and I think the Minister agrees with that. If there is a need for computerization, as I do not doubt there might be, then computerize the lighthouses, but the job of lighthouse keeper goes far beyond simply making sure that between dusk and dawn the proper lighting is available.

Mr. Skelly: There needs to be a public inquiry.

Mr. Deans: As my colleague from B.C. has said, he would like to see some kind of a public inquiry into the appropriateness of the action that is being taken by the Government. I would suggest to the Minister that he pay at least some heed to that suggestion because it makes some sense. I would suggest that the function of a lighthouse keeper is one that is not only necessary because of identification but is also necessary in that it provides navigational aids and help with search and rescue operations. It is therefore too important to simply let it pass.

I will say very little more. I do wish to say that the layoffs at CN announced just last week will, I submit, cause a problem for safety. If CN is going to undertake layoffs, it should present a proposal to deal with the maintenance of safety standards with fewer personnel before the layoffs become effective. Quite clearly, I can understand the economic problems that are faced, but I am not satisfied that the economic problems should be solved with the possible result that safety is affected. I think it should be part of the Minister's demand that as CN and CP consider the possibility of downsizing their workforces, they present to us how that will affect safety and what actions they propose to take to offset whatever effects it will have. The Minister will recall, of course, as he points out—