

S. O. 31

Two weeks ago the company demanded further concessions to meet those agreed to by the Illinois workers. This resulted in a 15 per cent reduction in wages over five years, a 10 per cent reduction in each of the first and second years, no increase in the third year and a 2.5 per cent increase in the fourth and fifth years.

The government has a responsibility to ensure that its election promises are kept, that a level playing field does not mean Canadian workers should be hammered down to American levels.

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IMMIGRATION

Mr. Harry Chadwick (Brampton—Malton): Mr. Speaker, recently officials from the Department of Immigration and some members of Parliament, including myself and representatives from the opposition, attended a public meeting where we were given a chance to listen to the concerns of refugees and immigrants.

With a large contingency present from the Sikh community, much of the meeting dealt with specific concerns of these individuals. It was a chance for us to gather together to discuss problems associated with the Canadian immigration process and to assure these individuals that the government continues to work at building a compassionate and fair immigration system.

I was most disappointed when opposition members used this meeting as a forum to bash government policy on immigration. Immigration is an issue where human emotion has an intrinsic impact requiring a delicate and careful approach on the part of government officials. If the opposition continues to misjudge the ability of constituents to see through these political manoeuvres, I am afraid they should brace themselves. With this kind of political misconjuncture, members of the opposition should be prepared to sit in opposition for some time to come.

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VIA RAIL

Mrs. Christine Stewart (Northumberland): Mr. Speaker, citizens in my riding of Northumberland and millions more across this country are stunned by the government's decision to cut essential VIA Rail passenger services. The Northumberland riding has had a 20 per

cent increase in ridership since the beginning of this year which levels out to 400 to 500 trips per day. VIA reports significantly underestimate the ridership levels. On the Corridor and Toronto—Havelock lines through my riding, the major destination point is Toronto where the routes provide essential service to commuters, students, seniors, as well as general public users. There is no alternative transportation service available.

When the Toronto—Havelock line was terminated in 1982, the federal Progressive Conservative Party provided the local citizens' group with \$15,000 on a matching dollar basis to fight the decision in court. At the time, the PCs promised the citizens' group that if they were elected VIA services would be improved and run in a businesslike way so as to increase ridership. This citizens' group and many others realize they were deceived by this government.

With citizens across this country depending on VIA Rail passenger services on a daily basis, I believe that this government must put a moratorium on the proposed rail service cuts of essential services. Further, this government has a moral, if not a legal responsibility to assure constant rail passenger service.

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[Translation]

SAFETY AT SEA

Mr. André Plourde (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup): Recently, when the Auditor General tabled his report, Mr. Speaker, he blamed the coast guard for assigning without reason an ice-breaker to the Matane—Baie-Comeau area. I suggest he was wrong, for he has failed to take into account the fact that during the Winter, in addition to ensuring ice-breaking duties for shipping, this boat provides the area with important search and rescue services.

Following the judicial inquiry into the loss of the *Hudson Transport* oil tanker in 1982, the judge recommended that a specialized search and rescue ship be assigned on a permanent basis to that area.

We should remember also that, as recently as last Winter, a fire started on board the *Star Rover* ship in that area. A quick intervention by this ice-breaker was instrumental in saving the lives of the crew members.