

Oral Questions

Hon. Benoit Bouchard (Minister of Transport): The Hon., Member for Montreal—Sainte-Marie enjoys his own reality as usual. Let me try and make a few corrections. There is absolutely no question of my giving any guarantee to you, because I did that yesterday, Mr. Speaker, to other Members. I am simply saying this, VIA Rail received reference levels for the next five years. The Corporation was asked to submit to us a series of proposals that would allow them to live within those reference levels. When the Government has received them, when we have reviewed them, we will accept or reject the Corporation's business plan, and in the meantime I would like to ask the Hon. Member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, rather than making VIA Rail employees feel insecure, to wait for this Government's decisions.

MINISTER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Mr. Jean-Claude Malépart (Laurier—Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, VIA Rail employees cannot be made to feel secure because the Minister in charge who should defend them is acting as a loudspeaker for VIA Rail's management. If the Minister earns \$50,000 more than we do, it is because he must assume his responsibilities. And if the Minister wants to take his own responsibilities and recommend a humane rationalization, would he be ready to recommend that VIA Rail be designated under the older worker adjustment program so that the latter applies and lay-offs are done humanely, on the basis of early retirement, rather than having management do a hatchet job? Take your responsibilities, you do not rate a chauffeur just to ride around.

Hon. Benoit Bouchard (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, anything can be said in this House, as we have just seen. I think the Hon. Member already decided there were lay-offs. He already decided to implement programs that come under my Government colleague. He already decided, in his own world, to live with fancy realities.

Under the administrative process, Mr. Speaker, as the Hon. Member should know, reports are made by a Crown corporation, an arm's length corporation which submits reports to the Government, on the basis of which the Government then makes decisions. This is

how things have always been done and this is how they go on being done.

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[English]

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

GRAIN NEGOTIATIONS WITH SOVIET UNION

Mr. David Walker (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board. As the Minister knows, the Port of Churchill is the best port for shipping grain from the West to the northern ports of the Soviet Union. Will the Minister confirm that the Canadian Wheat Board is currently negotiating with the Soviet Union for a wheat sale and September delivery of 2.5 million tonnes of grain? If this negotiation is successful, will the Minister direct that Churchill be used for these shipments?

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of Western Economic Diversification and Minister of State (Grains and Oilseeds)): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member will know that the Prairies suffered a very poor crop last year and the amount of wheat that we are going to export will likely be about half of what we exported a year ago. Consequently, there is going to be less grain for all ports including Churchill, Thunder Bay, Vancouver, and Prince Rupert.

With regard to myself, as Minister responsible stepping in and interfering with the day to day operations of the Wheat Board, I am very surprised that it is the position of the Liberal Party that we now have direct political interference in the operations of a Crown corporation. I stay out of the day to day operations of the Canadian Wheat Board. What I will do is make the Wheat Board aware of the Hon. Member's concerns, and I am sure the Board will do everything it can to see that there is an opportunity to sell grain through Churchill as long as it is in the best interests of western farmers.

REVITALIZATION OF PORT OF CHURCHILL

Mr. David Walker (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the same Minister. Perhaps in his role as Minister for Western Economic Diversification he will be willing to intervene and help this community.