

Oral Questions

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Hon. Member for his support and sensitivity to the issues before us all in the House.

We will be working closely with my colleague the Secretary of State for External Affairs to ensure that Canadians of Chinese origin have all the help that they can get in terms of information having to do with their own families.

As the Hon. Member knows, part of the problem has traditionally been the difficulty getting exist visas from China. We will be pursuing every avenue that we can in humanitarian terms with my colleague the Secretary of State for External Affairs.

REQUEST FOR SPECIAL PROGRAM FOR CHINESE
IMMIGRANTS

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough West): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is also directed to the Minister of Immigration and, of course, it concerns China.

All Members of the House and Canadians are well aware of the problem and are sympathetic to the Chinese people in their struggle for democracy. While we hope and pray that the situation will improve, in view of the explosive nature of the situation, will the Minister consider setting up a special program to deal with those people who wish to escape China as it presently is?

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in my first answer, we have great concern and will be working with the Secretary of State on any measures that the Government can do as a whole that can be helpful.

We will also be discussing those measures with the UN High Commissioner on Refugees, as we do when special situations arise, and we will continue to ensure that we are doing everything that we can to help the Chinese.

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, I would like to preface my comments by complimenting the Government, specifically the Secretary of State for External Affairs, for the high level of competence and the deep level of concern that the Government of Canada is showing in this tragic situation in China.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

• (1430)

Mr. Broadbent: I assume the Minister will continue to keep the House informed both of new developments in that country and what the Government of Canada is doing.

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TRANSPORTATION

VIA RAIL SERVICES

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, I would like now to address my question to the Minister of Transport.

I have here a copy of the letter sent from a special adviser to the Prime Minister dated October 14, 1988, that is to say in the middle of the recent federal election campaign, in which this sentence occurs with reference to the plans for VIA Rail:

The plan is for specific capital programs to enhance the quality and reliability of VIA's services.

It goes on to say: "commitment is made to expand the dollar amount and improve the service of VIA Rail".

Is the Minister of Transport happy that a letter in the middle of an election should be sent out in which a commitment is made to expand and improve VIA Rail service and then after election the Government moves in precisely the opposite direction?

An Hon. Member: Double-cross.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I believe the April Budget brought down by the Minister of Finance was quite clear on the matter. The new reference levels we gave the Crown Corporation VIA Rail basically reflect our ability to invest in a transport mode that Canadians use only 3 to 4 per cent of the time. There is work to be done in developing transportation in Canada, something we have been trying to do since 1984, with relatively conclusive results. However, I repeat, Mr. Speaker, it is quite clear we can no longer afford to invest \$600 or \$700 million annually in a corporation that Canadians are using less and less or not at all. That is why, in consultation with the Department of Finance and the Government as a whole, we have used reference levels that will enable VIA Rail to let us know, to make proposals that the Government will