

Government Orders

the debt. How much could we buy in the way of social services or anything else for \$50 billion in a year?

The surprisingly mild public reaction toward the budget seems to indicate Canadians do not fully understand the full extent of our financial situation. Do they realize we are \$550 billion in debt and by the time the government ends its mandate we will be \$650 billion in debt? I do not think it has quite struck home yet.

It is therefore our job as a responsible opposition to tell Canadians all is not well. We must do much more to tackle our crippling debt and deficit situation. The fact our hon. colleague across the way from Haldimand—Norfolk only received two phone calls on this well illustrates this fact. The public is not aware of the severity of the problem.

What can be done? According to the government it is moving as fast as it possibly can to solve the problem. However, if we look closely at this baby step budget we find that is not the case. More can be done.

Look at my area of responsibility, official languages. I can very easily demonstrate how we can save money without sacrificing service to the public. We will look at my little area but this could be multiplied one dozen or two dozen times by other areas, thus illustrating we can find the money.

To be fair to the government, it has moved quietly even in the area of official languages to trim some of the excess spending, but not enough. The estimates show how approximately \$50 million has been taken from official languages spending in the Department of Canadian Heritage. Likewise, there is a small reduction in the budget for the commissioner of official languages.

Again, these are only baby steps in the right direction. There are many more areas that can be reduced or eliminated. Funding of special interest groups is a classic example. We are looking at one little area of detail within overall official languages. This year Canadian heritage alone will spend \$28.5 million. Where does this money go? About \$1 million will go again this year to Alliance Quebec, a so-called English language rights group in Quebec. I say so-called because it is difficult to truly believe this group is doing any meaningful work to preserve English rights in Quebec.

• (1210)

Earlier this week I stood in the House and asked the government why it would give Alliance Quebec \$1.2 million when it has been learned \$837,000 of that is being spent on wages, while another \$95,000 goes to pay for luxury offices in downtown Montreal. At the same time its membership has sunk to an all time low of about 2,500. This figure was disputed on radio this week by Mr. Hamelin, head of Alliance Quebec, who said its numbers have risen to 3,700. Even if they have, this is down

from a membership strength of 15,000 or 20,000 some years ago. What is going on?

The government response to my question on the donation to Alliance Quebec was: "It is important the Canadian government supports minority language groups outside and inside Quebec. That is what we are doing. That is what we will continue to do".

If we examine that answer we will quickly discover it does not make any sense. How can anyone claim that lining the pockets of a few well heeled Liberal friends in the Montreal area does anything to support the anglophone community within Quebec? This group spends 75 per cent of its taxpayer supported budget on wages and rent. What can it actually be doing to support the community it purports to represent?

Worse yet, when my office requested this type of financial information from Alliance Quebec and other similar language groups throughout Canada, we were told that information was not public knowledge and therefore was not available to us. We were told to contact Treasury Board if we wanted information. Treasury Board then told us it could only provide the overall grant information which is readily available in public accounts and therefore of little value. For detailed information we were told to contact Canadian heritage. It in turn told us in most cases it did not have the information and what it had was not available to us.

I have been fighting this situation for a year and a half in the House trying to get some facts on spending of the government and all I get is sandbagging. This is taxpayers money supposedly being spent for the benefit of all Canadians. The people who provide the funds are not allowed to know how they are spent.

It is only through the persistence of a reporter at *La Presse* that the information on Alliance Quebec was brought to the attention of the public. It takes a reporter to get it out. This is unacceptable.

It is also interesting to note that official languages may well be the only federal program to have totally escaped the scrutiny of the Auditor General. This program has been in place for a quarter of a century and has never been fully audited. What is going on here? Where is this money being spent? What can we eliminate?

Part V of the 1993-94 public accounts which detail funds for professional special services shows almost \$9 million spent in the name of official languages. For example, Privy Council, \$900,000; communications, \$4 million; transport, \$340,000; energy, mines and resources, \$500,000; external affairs, \$255,000; national defence, \$1.6 million, to name a few. How these moneys were spent and for what purpose is a mystery.

Similarly, part VIII of the 1993-94 public accounts shows \$273 million for official languages transfer payments; over \$270 million of that by communications and \$2.5 million by employment and immigration. Again, for what purpose? Only