

Oral Questions

maintenance of President Yeltsin in office as the only elected head of government in Russia in a thousand years.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister.

It was reported in *The Winnipeg Free Press* today that the Minister of Agriculture indicated that the government is considering spending an extra \$80 million to make up the shortfall of 500,000 tonnes of grain promised or committed to Russia last June.

Is the government simply going to unfreeze the credit system that was arrived at last June? Are we planning to spend an extra \$80 million to fulfil the previous commitment? Or, are there going to be new commitments made for new grain assistance to Russia?

If I might ask as well, is the government considering altering the charter or the legislation of the Wheat Board to allow it to engage in direct barter arrangements with Russia in order to facilitate the grain trade between the two countries?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, in regard to the question raised by my hon. friend, 523,000 tonnes out of 1 million tonnes of the grain shipment agreed to in June have already been shipped. Shipments were temporarily suspended simply because Russia was paying some creditors in hard cash and not honouring some commitments to Canada.

• (1425)

Had all of us been placed on the same footing there would have been no difficulty. But I have had discussions with President Yeltsin about this. The matter is satisfactorily resolved and our expectation is we will be able to proceed.

I mention as well the question properly raised by my friend yesterday about the nuclear safety initiative, which was a \$30 million commitment by Canada over three years. Approximately \$8 million will be disbursed in this fiscal year honouring that commitment.

Technical assistance in general, which is a very vast and I think constructive program between Canada and Russia with a wide range of projects, is well under way in some pretty impressive people-to-people ways. I give my hon. friend one illustration: 700 Russian oilfield workers and managers are being trained as a result of Canadian assistance in safety and petroleum production. With the

assistance of Canadian community colleges funded by Canada the training programs at three Russian oil and gas institutes are being significantly upgraded with 20,000 Russian students benefiting from Canadian expertise delivered at the ground floor level.

If we multiply this kind of technical assistance program perhaps dozens of times we get an indication of what Canada has been seeking to do.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was quoted yesterday as saying that they are now looking at another aid package that might be part of a larger commitment, and I think he indicated there have been some initial discussions.

Given that Canadians share this deep concern about the seriousness of the situation in Russia, but also knowing that we live very much in a time of constraint, I think it is clear that any new initiative should have the support of the public as expressed in this Parliament.

I want to ask the Prime Minister if the government would commit to full parliamentary consultations on any new aid or assistance package so there can be a consensus on what Canada can do to assist the people of Russia, so we can determine where the money will come from and what purposes will be served.

The Prime Minister would agree it is important at this time to have full agreement and consent of the people of this country as expressed through all their parliamentary representatives.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree with the suggestion of my hon. friend that a parliamentary debate on this matter would be very appropriate. Obviously the government would be happy to lay its plan in this regard on the floor of the House of Commons. My hon. friend can comment on it, approve it, criticize it and do all the things we ought to do in a parliament.

When one looks back at the Marshall plan and the extraordinary success it had in rebuilding Europe and in maintaining vibrant democracies throughout European countries that had once been devastated, when one considers the extremely modest contributions, relatively speaking, being sought for the former Soviet Union and the timidity and the hesitation encountered in some G-7 and other industrialized countries, it is astonishing to see that this is actually taking place.