

Oral Questions

It is simply a matter of how we ensure proper distribution of benefits, something totally beyond the understanding of Reform Party members.

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[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in its foreign policy statement, the government pledged to get closer to the objective of allocating 0.7 per cent of the GNP to foreign aid. Yet, the recent budget provides for cuts of \$1.3 billion over a three-year period. The net result is that Canada will spend less than 0.29 per cent of its GNP on humanitarian assistance, thus reducing its aid to levels unseen since the sixties.

How can the Minister of Foreign Affairs justify his government's decision to reduce food aid to the poorest nations of the world, to a degree well beyond the average level of reduction announced in the last budget, while at the same time forgiving debts of \$800 millions incurred by less needy countries?

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quite right as regards the need to temporarily reduce the budget allocated to international development assistance.

However, the hon. member is absolutely wrong when he concludes that food aid will be cut. Indeed, he is referring to a document which only gives a partial idea of the moneys which will be allocated to food aid, whether through the efforts of the government within multilateral organizations, or through bilateral assistance programs. I can assure the hon. member that our food aid efforts will remain very significant.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I read the budget tabled by the minister's colleague, the Minister of Finance. Are we to understand that the scope of the budget cuts affecting Canada's aid to the poorest nations of the world is the direct result of the government's new foreign policy, which gives priority to trade, at the expense of these countries?

• (1435)

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the answer is no. It is obvious that even the hon. member does not think it is the case, since he is choking while asking the question.

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[English]

LABOUR

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport.

The current labour situation in the railways could easily lead to a national strike or railway lockout. This would have immediate and devastating effects on the Canadian economy.

When will the minister take action and introduce back to work legislation?

[Translation]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yes, the railway sector is experiencing some difficulties with labour relations. But I was delighted to learn that Canadian Pacific has reached an agreement in principle with three of its unions, which represent nearly 3,000 employees, on a wage increase, a change respecting job security and social benefits. This agreement is to be submitted to the members for ratification.

I hope that for management and labour, this will be a first step towards reaching an agreement. At this stage it is definitely premature to talk about back-to-work legislation.

[English]

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, Canadian farmers took a tremendous hit in the budget and they are willing to do that if they know the government will back them up when it comes to getting their product to market.

What they would like to know is whether this government is willing to introduce back to work legislation as soon as possible to help them a little after the government has knocked the pins out from underneath them.

[Translation]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we abide by the Canada Labour Code, and we are urging the parties to negotiate and reach an agreement, which does not mean we are not monitoring the situation very closely. We hope that the parties will negotiate and reach an agreement. That is the position of this government.

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BLOOD SUPPLY SYSTEM

Mrs. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Health.

Since she was appointed, the minister has answered all our questions about the blood system in Canada by saying we have the best system in the world. However, the facts keep challenging the minister's position on the actual quality of the system.

How can the minister claim we have the best blood supply system in the world when, in an unprecedented move, the Red Cross suspended the director of the Quebec City centre after it failed a Health Canada inspection?