

Government Orders

• (1620)

So, that is somewhat unfair. However, we recognize that this legislation to help the Eastern provinces is still worth something and we think the freeze will be extremely hard on these regions which are going through tough economic times. The 10 per cent freeze stipulated in the legislation is a very harsh measure.

As for the 10 to 15 per cent increase in the West, it is also a tough decision which brings into question the supply process we had in the East for crops coming from western regions. Finally, the hon. member wondered about the port of Montreal and mentioned that the use of ice-breakers was extremely costly. Personally, I think the port of Montreal was one of the most profitable ports in Canada and was affected by the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway. If you want to maintain the seaway, which does not serve only Montreal, but links the city to other parts of Canada, you need to keep the port of Montreal open in the winter months. That seems as obvious to me as it was to the Government of Canada when it decided to build the Seaway.

Although I understand very well the issues raised by the hon. member, I want to tell him that I do not agree at all with him about wheat production in western Canada and the subsidies going directly to the farmers instead of the shippers. Above all, I do not agree with his view on keeping the port of Montreal open in the winter months, even though it costs money. We have gained some expertise in the area of ice-control throughout Canada and the Coast Guard is renowned throughout the world. We could even export our expertise, make it some kind of know how, as you say in English, knowledge we could export.

That is all I had to say following the brilliant speech made by the Reform member, even though I do not agree with him.

[English]

Mr. Gouk: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his comments and questions.

With regard to prairie grain subsidies I would point out that if they go to the farmers they still have to transport their grain. It is not a question that they are going to pocket that money, use it for other things, and not bother to ship their grain because there is no way to get paid until they ship it.

The point I was trying to make during my presentation was that these subsidies to western grain farmers could be reduced or, for that matter, virtually eliminated if we also eliminated the other unnecessary expenditures they are burdened with right now because of the problems with shipping grain other than the cost factors.

With regard to the port of Montreal the hon. member seemed to indicate that it should be kept open because it was a decision made by the Canadian government. It was also a decision made

by the Canadian government that put us over \$500 billion in debt. I do not think the hon. member likes that decision. Many decisions made in the past have to be questioned.

I am not questioning whether we should be keeping the port of Montreal open. To suggest that we shut down the port would be ridiculous. In my speech I said that I had no objection to the icebreaking service being made available to ships, but let them pay the cost of having this service provided to them. It otherwise forms an extremely expensive offset subsidy in direct proportion to all other subsidies for the service.

We have to look at ways of cutting all costs right across the country in virtually every area the government does business. This is just another way of addressing the problem.

Ms. Albina Guarnieri (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Canadian Heritage): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to join today's debate. I am rising to speak in support of Bill C-17 and to address more particularly clause 18 which introduces an amendment to the Broadcasting Act. This amendment will allow the CBC a greater measure of financial flexibility.

• (1625)

I would like first to convey my appreciation to the Minister of Finance faced with the difficult task of balancing so many competing priorities. His support for the CBC has been most gratifying. I know the employees of the CBC, including very many talented Canadian artists along with millions of loyal CBC viewers, also join me in expressing their appreciation.

[Translation]

The importance of public broadcasting in Canada fully justifies such a commitment. Thanks to public broadcasting, Canadians remain in touch with one another locally and nationally scene and with the whole world. Public broadcasting also gives all communities across this vast country of ours a chance to define and articulate their own vision of the world. Public broadcasting plays a decisive role in reaffirming our national identity.

That is why annual budget funding for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation totals about \$1 billion. This is 62 per cent of all federal funding for cultural agencies reporting to the Department of Canadian Heritage.

However, the financial situation of the CBC has deteriorated in recent years. Since 1984, its budget has been cut by over \$200 million, which has had the effect of increasing its dependence on advertising revenue. In 1984, this source of financing made up 21 per cent of the CBC's total budget. Today, it is 36 per cent of the CBC's total budget, an increase of 15 per cent, although this has not been enough to turn around a very serious deficit. Its