

*Government Orders*

The official opposition is proposing in Motion No. 7 that clause 16, which exempts grain dependent branch lines from the notice of intention provision under the NTA be deleted. As I stated, this proposal would make it more difficult and cumbersome for railroad companies to abandon inefficient and costly grain dependent branch lines.

I will not take the time of the House to go through some of the other motions. In these I have reviewed the major differences we have with the official opposition. As I stated before, the changes being proposed in Bill C-76 will be of great benefit to the western Canadian agricultural community and that spills over to the rest of the country. People in every province will see a much stronger Canada as the western grain farmers and other agriculture producers gain maximum advantage from changes in our regulations and laws.

**Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to this group of proposed amendments. We have some difficulties with some of the clauses of the budget implementation act. Some of the clauses give arbitrary powers to cabinet to make decisions.

It reminds me a little of earlier in the bill of some of the powers given to the Public Service Commission, for example, where it is allowed to appoint people without competition. Arbitrary powers are never a good thing to give out.

Under the powers of the Public Service Commission, members will know that over the next three years the government will be spending some \$41 million to, among other things, recruit new public servants from designated groups under the special measures initiatives run by the Public Service Commission. At a time of substantial layoffs it is a huge amount of power given to a commission to recruit people at the cost of tens of millions of dollars, when we are laying off 45,000 others. It seems a little ridiculous to me. It is obviously unfair to be hiring new workers at a time when thousands of surplus ones are eager and willing to work at any of the jobs.

It is particularly an insult to hard working civil servants who have spent many years working in a position only to come to work one day to find that their desk has been cleaned out and a fresh new face is in the office doing their work and the job they are fully qualified for, but they lost it because another person was hired under the special measures initiative or the employment equity program.

That is the kind of arbitrary power we do not think the Public Service Commission should have. We believe that arbitrary powers giving cabinet or in the case I am talking about, the Public Service Commission, the ability to bypass merit or the regular way of doing business, to hiring, promoting, firing and so on, is not a good thing.

• (1640)

We need checks and balances on government. The bill gives too much power to a select few people. The power I mentioned the Public Service Commission has under the bill is typical of that. Other clauses in this transportation area give the cabinet in our opinion too much power but I will leave it at that.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mark Assad (Gatineau—La Lièvre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Bill C-76, which is the continuation of the budget and deals with the Work Force Adjustment Directive, is a rather important one. It drew many comments, especially from the Reform Party and the Bloc. I believe there are some fundamental elements we should take into account in Parliament. For all intents and purposes, we are the voice of our fellow citizens, and it is important that they know exactly what is at stake here.

I listened to the Reform members talk about the deficit, government spending, and the debt which is growing at the rate of \$100 million a day, and also to all their arguments to the effect that the government must cut expenditures. As we know, it has been proven, on many occasions, that at the present time, except for the debt service, the regular operating expenditures of the government do not exceed its revenue. The debt service is very high in Canada because we have an accumulated debt of close to \$500 billion.

Members opposite keep on talking about government spending. But we must not forget that expenditures are only one of the elements of the deficit we are facing in this country. One must not single out the expenditures of the Canadian government as the only reason for our deficit.

In the past, deficits were very high, as compared to total expenditures. Expenditures were high in the past, as we saw under the previous government. I am not trying to say that we were blameless in the past; in some instances, expenditures went well beyond what should have been tolerable. In any case, what is important now is to correct the situation. One must not lose track of the fact that expenditures are but one element.

Second, we must recognize that our tax system being slightly obsolete, the in-depth reform of our tax system is one of the elements which is going to put our economy back on a level that is acceptable to all Canadians, especially the middle class.

Third, and this is important, it is the monetary system of this country which causes our interest rates to be too high. We must recognize that the Bank of Canada has a role to play. In the past, the Bank of Canada played a very important role in controlling interests rates nationally. But, because of our deficit, we lost this power. However, with good management, it should be possible to get it back. We are trying. It will take several years, but let us hope we will succeed within one mandate or one and a half at the most. We want the Bank of Canada to really play an