

Government Orders

I must speak for a moment on the WGTA. It is widely known that I have spent the better part of my life defending the so-called Crow rate. I still believe there is an obligation the railways have never met in all the discussions and changes over the years. Regardless, the change is being made which will affect western producers and communities.

● (1255)

Adjustment measures are in place, the \$300 million adjustment and the compensation for land prices. I underline the fact that the WGTA has been in effect since the turn of the century. It was the cornerstone of agricultural policy in the west.

I accept the changes but we must recognize the impact. There will be impact in areas other than financial areas such as highways, car allocations, quality control, the wheat board, et cetera. We have to listen to the producers so they can outline to us the changes they want.

These are different times. We must get our financial house in order. The real solutions will be found in the country, in the hearts and minds of the people who will be affected. We as MPs must continue to consult with constituents to find solutions.

[Translation]

Mr. Philippe Paré (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when a bad decision is made, nothing could be more justified than to try to delay its implementation. That is why the dilatory motion put forth by the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot is relevant and why I support it.

In the next few minutes, I will try to demonstrate how appalling the finance minister's budget is as far as the drastic cuts to official development assistance it contains are concerned. This decision without vision makes it clear why the government did not want to make any commitments in early February, when the Canadian foreign policy statement was released. Also, the excessive focus on trade in this new foreign policy is brought to light in the budget tabled on February 27.

The early 1990s signalled the end of any measure that would have enabled Canada to reach the target of 0.7 per cent of GDP for official development assistance. In the 1991 budget, aid spending on Eastern European countries and the Commonwealth of Independent States was increased at the expense of ODA.

In his 1992 economic statement, the Minister of Finance cut \$50 million in the international assistance envelope. The 1994 budget called for international assistance to be reduced by another two per cent in 1994 and 1995, but what this budget says is quite different. Ignoring this commitment to cut only 2 per cent, the Minister of Finance decided to cut 21 per cent, or \$532 million, from the development assistance budget.

In addition, the cuts announced between now and 1997-98 represent a shortfall of \$1.3 billion for our international co-operation programs. As I said, these cuts mean a 21 per cent reduction in the total development assistance budget. I would point out to this House that the cuts to the Department of National Defence represent only 14.2 per cent. Surprising for a government that acknowledged the threats to our society in the post cold war period come, in large part, from development problems.

In 1994, the development assistance budget corresponded to 0.4 per cent of Canada's GNP; in 1997, the figure will drop to less than 0.3 per cent. This will make Canada one of the least generous of the industrialized countries, because this figure will be below the average of the OECD countries.

The budget of the Export Development Corporation grew by \$155 million, whereas the budget of the voluntary sector of official development assistance will be cut by \$45 million. Where is the logic in all this? The cuts to the budgets of NGOs lucky enough to still receive support are estimated at about 15 per cent.

The Bloc Québécois' position on development assistance has always been clear, unlike the Liberals' position in their red book. It has remained consistent from the speeches by the Leader of the Opposition during the 1993 elections to debates in the House and in committee. Should I point out that the Liberals had set 0.7 per cent of the GNP as an objective for official development assistance?

We can understand, in a time of budget restraint, the government's making major cuts in the development assistance budget.

● (1300)

However, in light of the work done by the special joint committee, that assistance programs for volunteer organizations will be hardest hit by these cuts is totally unacceptable.

Last Friday, CIDA announced a 100 per cent cut in funding for NGOs working in the area of public awareness of international development among Canadians. This will take effect on April 1. The Bloc Québécois obviously objects to these measures and to the way they were announced, with only one week's advance notice. I do not understand this budget measure. The savings the cut will generate only account for 0.5 per cent of the total official development assistance budget. The consequences and the chain reaction that this measure will set off on the international solidarity and co-operation network are inestimable.

One thing we can already be sure of is that the future of close to one hundred small NGOs which are mostly located in the outlying regions, already raise 50 per cent of their funding from other sources and co-ordinate the activities of thousands of committed volunteers, is in danger.