

Bretton Woods Agreements Act

have actually received payments amounting to 75 per cent of Canada's contributions to those institutions. The share of procurements in Canada that have been financed by the World Bank is equal or greater than our share in OECD exports to developing countries. Nonetheless, we believe we can do better. Therefore, Canada's trade office in Washington has been strengthened and our procedures in Ottawa streamlined to better help Canadian firms cope with the World Bank's procurement needs.

Mr. Speaker, we are experiencing trying economic times, but the sad conditions which are particularly severe in developing countries and what actually goes on in those countries have a direct impact on Canadians with respect to our exports, our employment situation and the stability of our financial structures. The world economy has never been so closely interrelated.

Some of the recent incidents have made it crystal clear to us that we simply cannot ignore those problems. Television screens brought into our living rooms telling and striking scenes of hardships caused by drought and the resulting famine. Canadians reacted with unprecedented generosity, fully aware that we cannot remain indifferent to the woes which are the lot of other human beings.

The Bill under consideration today confirms once again that Canada does not intend to let developing countries fend for themselves when they most need assistance. It reaffirms as well Canada's strong support for multilateral endeavours—the World Bank Group is a shining example—which have done so much to maintain peace and guarantee the well-being of nations through these trying times.

With that in mind, Mr. Speaker, we urge all deeply concerned Members to support the Government and confirm the sincere Canadian commitment to those international institutions. We hope they will quickly and efficiently consider this very important piece of legislation.

● (1250)

[English]

Miss Aileen Nicholson (Trinity): Mr. Speaker, this particular Bill will consolidate legislative authority for Canada's participation in three affiliates of the World Bank group. Thus the Bretton Woods Agreements Act is to become the Bretton Woods and Related Agreements Act.

Bill C-30 also proposes a change in how Parliament is asked to approve Canada's participation in these international financial institutions. It is proposed that authority for expenditure be sought annually through the Estimates. The practice until now has been to amend the Act, that is to bring a Bill before the House. So with the new proposal the House will lose an opportunity each year to debate a Bill dealing with international development, but Members will be able to see from year to year in the Estimates that Canada is indeed meeting its obligations to these institutions and that our commitments remain strong. Of course, there will be opportunity for discus-

sion of these matters in committee. In 1982, a similar provision was adopted by this House with respect to the regional development banks, the Asian Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Caribbean Development Bank.

We in the Official Opposition see no particular reason for a long debate of this Bill. Canada is a co-founder and major player in the institutions with which the Bill deals. The World Bank and its affiliates are the most important multilateral institutions in the world dedicated to fostering economic health and well-being, and we would like to see Canada's contributions go forward in a timely fashion. But because we have relatively few occasions to bring the subject before the House, we would like to talk about these institutions today and while the Bill remains before the House.

International finance is a complex subject indeed, but Canadians are entitled to know where their money is going and why. Our own well-being is closely linked to the economic security of other countries in the world. Behind the technical language of a Bill, we see evidence that Canada is truly interested and committed to helping alleviate if not resolve the problems of a large number of developing countries in varying degrees of financial difficulty. In this Canada has had a long and honourable tradition.

As Hon. Members will know, the name Bretton Woods refers to the village in New Hampshire where, in the summer of 1944, representatives of 28 nations, including Canada, met. All were deeply concerned about the adequacy of the international monetary system after the chaos created by the Great Depression and World War II. Following that war, Europe and Japan found their economies in a shambles. The capital needed to maintain even a minimal standard of living was lacking. Countries which had not experienced massive wartime destruction still had to face the difficult task of converting wartime economies into peacetime and consumer-oriented economies.

A number of economic conferences took place in the immediate post-World War II period to address these problems. The Bretton Woods conference is significant because it established the key institutions of a new international system. GATT, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade; the IMF, the International Monetary Fund; and the IBRD, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, also known as the World Bank, were born at Bretton Woods. The founders of these institutions recognized that the prosperity of the world would depend on an orderly and flexible trading system. The IMF was created to provide stability to the global monetary and financial system. The World Bank was created to provide long-term financing to member states in need of it, first, to help in rebuilding post-war Europe, and then to promote economic development in developing countries. GATT was instituted to bring a more liberal trading system to the world after the insular and destructive beggar-thy-neighbour policies of the post-World War I years.

This new international monetary system had as its task to provide exchange rate stability and a greater degree of mone-