

Oral Questions

Hon. Allan B. McKinnon (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer this question because there has been a great deal of misinformation going around on this matter in the last week or so. The hon. member has obviously fallen prey to it.

We put a cap on the rental raises of \$20 for the first two ranks of private, \$35 on the rank of corporal, and the maximum of \$50 on any rank above corporal. There is another overriding cap, that no serviceman will be charged more than 25 per cent of his total pay for rent. I might go over the pay rates and point those out while I am on my feet.

Mr. Speaker: Order. That may take more time than we can allow in the question period.

Mr. Axworthy: Mr. Speaker, I will not raise my supplementary with the non-leader of the Conservative party; I will raise it with the Minister of National Defence. Under the circumstances, has the minister investigated whether, in fact, the statements made by members of the armed forces personnel, the commanders of the camps, that over 50 per cent of the lower ranks are now below the official poverty line are true? Has this matter been investigated and, if so, is the minister prepared to take action to provide some compensation in the area of rent? Also, because of the statements made about the conditions and quality of the PMQs across Canada, is the minister prepared to ask the minister responsible for housing if there can be RRAP funds established for the armed forces personnel to bring their houses up to the same standard of repair as ordinary homes across Canada?

Mr. McKinnon: Mr. Speaker, I am rather surprised at that question, considering who put in the restrictions in budget over the last ten years.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McKinnon: Some seven or eight years ago, the government of the day decided to make the rent charges for married quarters comparable to the economy. They called in the CMHC to come up with figures for the areas in which married quarters were located. This was then found to be unacceptable in so far as the imposition of the rates went, and some three or four years went by without imposing any of these rent increases. Now they want to impose the increases all at once, and this is unacceptable.

This situation has turned into a shambles. I have put a cap on these raises to protect servicemen and I have asked that the matter be investigated again to determine whether or not we can go back to what the situation was before the previous government decided to bring in this scheme, which we found almost impossible to administer. I am expecting in the next couple of days a report on some suggestions with regard to what we might do for a permanent cure to this illness.

[Mr. Clark.]

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**AID FOR THOSE STARVING IN CAMBODIA**

Mr. Ian Watson (Châteauguay): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Secretary of State for External Affairs. It is related to the continuing frustrations which the various aid agencies are meeting in their attempts to save hundreds of thousands of Cambodians from starvation. Whatever we may think of the method whereby the new Vietnamese-supported Cambodia regime of Heng Samrin came to power, surely we all recognize that Vietnam holds the key to any massive increase in aid to Cambodia and that the Pol Pot regime, which has been effectively replaced, was responsible for killing two million to three million of its own citizens under conditions every bit as appalling as the Nazi holocaust.

Since leverage with Vietnam will help save Cambodian lives, will not recent criticisms of Vietnam destroy any possible influence Canada might have with the one country which does have leverage, Vietnam, and why is Canada at least giving the appearance of diplomatic support to the criminal Pol Pot regime? Finally, in refusing to recognize the new Vietnamese backed government of Cambodia, are we doing so because we are afraid to offend China and, if that is the case, then are we not cynically—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I think I owe it to the minister to allow him equal time in this debate.

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On a per capita basis, Canada has contributed more in the way of providing replacement settlements for victims or refugees of the Indo-China situation than any other country in the world. We have also, on a per capita basis—with the exception of Australia—provided more in the way of relief funds for refugees in Indo-China.

This situation will not be resolved by humanitarian efforts alone. It will be resolved when we tackle its political causes, and its political causes lie with Vietnam.

There is no question that in speaking out about what Vietnam has been doing, whether in Vietnam itself or in the invasion of its forces into Cambodia and Laos, the effect of that has been, in the first place, to cut down on the number of expulsions from Vietnam by way of boat people. That has become very evident since these statements have been made.

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Second, I have been given the assurance in recent days, by members of the international agencies which are trying to carry out relief missions through Cambodia, that it is only because some of the countries in the world dare to tackle the political issues that they are able to get on with their humanitarian efforts.