

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. I, and I am sure thousands of other Canadians, are appalled by the hypocrisy of the Prime Minister's speech in Costa Rica. The Prime Minister told Latin American leaders how concerned he was about Third World debt. He told them how concerned he was about poverty in Latin America, how concerned he was for the need for foreign aid.

Why didn't the Prime Minister tell Latin American leaders according to the official estimates of the Canadian International Development Agency, the current report given to Parliament, that out of his great concern for poverty in Latin America he has cut developmental assistance to Latin American countries by over \$20 million this year?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition may have been disappointed at the Prime Minister's speech in Costa Rica. I can tell him that all of the heads of governments of Latin America, the Caribbean, and of North America very much welcomed, not simply the joining by Canada of the Organization of American States, but the clear indication that now Latin America, our neighbour in this hemisphere, is going to be a major priority of this government as we play our full role not only in the rest of the world but also in this hemisphere.

With regard to aid, the Leader of the Opposition knows better than anyone else that the reason there have been reductions in the levels of ODA expenditure is because this government was faced with a massive deficit created by the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition and by his colleagues when they were in government. We cannot ignore that deficit, nor can we pretend like ODA. What we have done is undertaken a program that keeps our commitment to get the deficit down and allows Canada to play a leading role in contributing to international development in Latin America and all around the world.

Oral Questions

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Mr. Speaker, why in those circumstances didn't the Prime Minister come clean with his Latin American colleagues that he was cutting aid to their region, instead of extolling himself and his government in a flowery speech to the Costa Rican audience?

Part of a precondition to any membership in that organization should have been a meaningful presence diplomatically and a meaningful presence in terms of aid in the region and, indeed, a full parliamentary and public discussion preceding that decision.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, in the same speech to Latin American leaders, the Prime Minister said that external debt problems in this region were a cause for great concern, and that he intended to help them. Again, why didn't the Prime Minister tell the Latin American leaders that last April, the Canadian Government cut Canadian aid to the Inter-American Development Bank by more than 40 per cent, and assistance given to the Caribbean Development Bank by more than 80 per cent? Isn't this rank hypocrisy?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I know the Leader of the Opposition will or would be both surprised and pleased to hear that all government leaders present last Friday and Saturday congratulated not only Canada and the Canadian Government for having taken this important initiative to enhance Canada's relations with Latin America. I think it is also important to point out that Canada's decision was approved by a great Canadian, the Hon. Paul Martin, Senior, who said today in a report that Canada's decision to play a more active role in the OAS was long overdue.

As far as the debt is concerned, the Leader of the Opposition knows perfectly well that Canada played an important part in dealing with Mexico's debt under the Brady Plan, that the Minister of Finance led an important initiative to help Guyana, and that all members of the Commonwealth attending the conference in Kuala Lumpur thanked us for the generosity of all Canadians.

• (1420)

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Mr. Speaker, it is true that since the day he made his first speech in the House in 1935, Paul Martin had considered this possibility, but even Mr. Martin would be sorry to hear this morning that the Government's actions are a direct contradiction of its statements.