

Oral Questions

a shortage of adequately trained personnel to fill the positions which are now available?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, in answer to the hon. member, I believe it is a combination of both. There is a shortage of moneys and there is also a shortage of properly trained personnel.

* * *

NATIONAL ENERGY PROGRAM**EMERGENCY PLANNING TO DISTRIBUTE GASOLINE RATIONING COUPONS**

Mr. G. M. Gurbin (Bruce-Grey): Madam Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and the Postmaster General, I should like to direct my question to the Acting Prime Minister. I assure him that this party and people across the country are very interested in energy self-sufficiency and are aware of the government program for emergency energy rationing.

Is the minister aware of the directive which has gone to local post offices across Canada asking them to prepare for the distribution of coupons for gasoline rationing?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, I am not aware of that but I will inquire. I would find it quite normal, if we are to be prepared for any eventuality, for the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources to be ready for such a possibility.

Mr. Gurbin: Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Acting Prime Minister. I should like to assure him that this is not just a casual preparation for any eventuality; this is a specific directive which has told people in post offices across Canada that their workers, as of April 1, 1981, will be asked to work 14 hours a day to distribute these coupons to people for gasoline rationing.

Will the minister inform the House of the total effect of this? What does the government really have in mind? Does this mean that we have an emergency energy situation and that the National Energy Program has indeed been a failure?

An hon. Member: That we know.

Mr. Pepin: Madam Speaker, it is the characteristic of an emergency not to be expected. But I will find out further, and I am sure my hon. friend will have his answer in the coming days.

* * *

GRAIN**COMPENSATION TO FARMERS FOR EMBARGO ON SHIPMENTS TO RUSSIA**

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon West): Madam Speaker, I should like to direct my question to the Minister of Agricul-

ture. It is supplementary to the one posed by the hon. member for Lisgar with respect to the compensation to which western grain farmers are entitled as a result of the embargo on the U.S.S.R.

The minister has been putting off the decision and the announcement. It was originally planned to be given by August 1, 1980, at the end of the crop year. It was put off, and at the beginning of December the minister said that it would be a few days. Will the minister make a commitment now that any compensation determined by cabinet will include an interest rate from the end of the last crop year equal to the interest rates that western farmers carry on their supplies and costs? Will he make a commitment that they will be entitled to receive interest on this long overdue compensation?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, the hon. member knows as well as I that it not only includes western farmers, it includes commercial grain farmers in any part of Canada. It is an important factor also in the central part of Canada because, for instance, the province of Ontario produces more commercial grain than the province of Manitoba. So, it affects them similarly.

I cannot say what the decision will be. The submission has been made, but the hon. member is so wrong. The crop year only ended on August 1. How in the world could we have all the figures calculated by that time? It took longer than we thought. We thought we would have them ready for November 1. We did not have them by late November or December 1. We did not have them until some time in December, and I believe they were considered in January. They were considered at that time interdepartmentally, and not too many days or weeks ago they were submitted to cabinet. They are being considered in a very concentrated and determined fashion at the present time.

I wish I could tell the hon. member that interest rates and all that will be considered. But he is fully aware that in the last year one and a quarter crops have been delivered. So, a tremendous amount of grain has been moved. When we were talking about making the payments to them, many farmers said that they did not want them before January 1, that they wanted them after that because they did not want to pay too much income tax. So, the shortage of money is not as the hon. member said.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Madam Speaker, in the speech from the throne at the start of this session the Prime Minister and the government gave Members of Parliament from western Canada a special mandate to speak on behalf of western grain farmers. That is what my colleagues and I on this side of the House are trying to do. But, all we get from the government is double talk, double track, and double cross.

Would the minister make a commitment that a statement will be made and that payment will be forthcoming to western Canadian farmers before the end of this month? It is a simple question. I would like an answer.