

another offer which we hope they will match? We are prepared to be flexible, and we are waiting for their response.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I simply want to point out to the minister these realities. Thirty per cent of western Canadian farmers are in danger of losing their farms. Farm income in 1990, according to StatsCanada, in Manitoba alone will drop by 75 per cent. In Saskatchewan there will be an 85 per cent drop. In Alberta there will be a 66 per cent drop. The farmers cannot face that kind of situation without federal aid.

I want to ask the government this. Why is it in the interests of the Tory government to defend the ill-begotten designs of the Minister of Finance rather than defending the western Canadian farmer as it should?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, this government is defending the interests of every person who lives in Canada by trying to save this country's credit and financial resources and by trying to get flexibility and strength back for the future. We are doing that by still continuing to meet the needs of the farmers with this \$500 million offer and other offers that will be made in connection with the fishery in the next few days.

That is what we are attempting to do while the hon. gentleman opposite has not got one constructive suggestion to put forward.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for the status of women.

Once again, the government is trying to silence the voices of legitimate protest in this country. It is trying to make sure that the normal exercise of democracy cannot take place.

This morning in St. John's, Newfoundland, approximately 25 women were arrested. What were they arrested for? For trying to send a fax to the Secretary of State to protest the cuts to women's centres. They simply wanted to express their views.

Oral Questions

I ask the minister who is responsible, I will remind her, for the status of women, will she press for these charges to be dropped against these women who are simply standing up for their rights?

Mrs. Pauline Browes (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State of Canada and Minister of State (Multiculturalism and Citizenship)): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have an opportunity to set the record straight on this incident that happened this morning.

We are aware that in the last few days of last week there were demonstrations within the Secretary of State office in St. John's. Those persons left on the weekend.

In order to secure the documents within our Secretary of State office, as well as to service the public, the Secretary of State hired two additional security people, one for the outside and one for the inside of the office.

This morning about 25 women came into that office in spite of the security being there. They came into the office. They occupied the office. The security people asked them to leave. They did not leave. The security people asked the police to come and speak to the demonstrators in the Secretary of State office.

• (1430)

I wish to clarify that the police spoke to those 25 women and told them of the repercussions if they did not leave the office. They did not leave the office. They said they would leave, the police left, and then the lawyer for those women advised them what should happen.

What happened is that they were arrested and released—

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps we should proceed. The hon. member for Yukon.

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the Minister responsible for the Status of Women. The fact is that these women were peacefully trying to send a letter.

An Hon. Member: Fire the guards and spend the money.

Ms. McLaughlin: Obviously the Minister responsible for the Status of Women refuses to drop the charges against these women.