

Oral Questions

from his most recent Budget, it would appear that he believes the Canadian agricultural economy is sound. Does he understand that in the last four years since the Liberal Government came into power, agricultural bankruptcies have increased over 400 per cent and, more disturbingly, that in January, 1984, farm bankruptcies had increased over 60 per cent year over year? Is he aware of these facts? If so, why did he not take them into consideration in his last Budget?

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I have seen those figures. If the Hon. Member looks at the percentage of bankruptcies in the farming sector compared with those in the industrial sector, for instance, he will find that the agricultural economy has performed remarkably well under difficult circumstances. As far as possible measures are concerned, the Hon. Member knows that there is a Bill before the House which was introduced by my current Parliamentary Secretary, as well as one which was introduced by the Government under the Bankruptcy Act, which would help farmers. I hope this Bill receives early and complete consideration by the opposition Parties.

PLIGHT OF FARMERS WITH HIGH INTEREST RATE LOANS

Mr. G. M. Gurbin (Bruce-Grey): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the same Minister. I know he will be aware, despite his protestations, that those figures represent only the tip of the iceberg and that general farm economy indicators show that there are serious problems, problems which will spread across the country and create havoc in the agricultural industry unless the Government responds.

Is the Minister aware that there are over 8,000 Canadian farmers locked into loans with interest rates up to 16.75 per cent, with the Farm Credit Corporation? Is he taking into consideration with his colleagues some relief measures for these people who are locked into these high interest rates, people who were given a program by the Government for relief of up to 4 per cent and are now, after having been considered to be in distress, faced again with high interest rates of 16.75 per cent? Is he prepared to do anything to help them?

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I think the Conservatives could be helpful by supporting the Bill under the Bankruptcy Act which is before the committee and getting it back into the House and passed soon. In addition, the Hon. Member will remember that we introduced measures to help farmers in difficulty, and that several tens of millions of dollars have been used for that particular purpose.

WESTERN GRAIN STABILIZATION FUND

Mr. Arnold Malone (Crowfoot): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport. He will know that there is now nearly \$1 billion in the Western Grain Stabiliza-

tion Fund and that there is some concern with regard to the operation of the Fund. Is the Minister satisfied with the present formula for payout of moneys from the Western Grain Stabilization Fund? Bearing in mind that a study is under way at the present time, could he indicate to us how soon some amendments might be introduced, and what form those amendments might take?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I think the Hon. Member knows that in an exchange in the House before Christmas I expressed the same concern as he did, that the present operation of the Fund does not allow an effective payout during a time when there has been a reduction in farm income. As a result of that, my colleague, the Minister of State for the Canadian Wheat Board, is presently working on a number of proposals which should be considered by Cabinet in a very short period of time. We hope they will relieve the present situation.

INFLATION FACTOR

Mr. Arnold Malone (Crowfoot): Mr. Speaker, does the Minister anticipate a short period of time? Would it be before the start of the next crop year? In making any changes to the Western Grain Stabilization Fund, would he consider the inflation factor and increases in production which come about either by the opening of new lands or by an increase of efficiency on the part of farm producers?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I think the Hon. Member has presented two very important considerations which will be taken into account during that examination. I cannot give him a precise period of time in which the changes might be made. It all depends upon agenda and timing. However, I can tell him that we consider it to be a very serious matter and one to which we are paying close attention.

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FISHERIES

ATLANTIC SALMON STOCKS—QUOTA ALLOCATED TO GREENLAND

Mr. Lloyd R. Crouse (South Shore): Mr. Speaker, I had a question for the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, but I do not know whether he has left the House or has gone fishing. I guess he has gone fishing. Oh, here he is!

An Hon. Member: Holy mackerel!

Mr. Nielsen: My cod!

Mr. Crouse: The Minister is aware from his own statements that our Atlantic salmon stocks have been seriously decimated. We learned only yesterday in committee that the Greenlanders