

Oral Questions

On Thursday, we will be visiting Brussels where we are going to meet with Commissioner Morin, the Fisheries Commissioner of the European Community.

We are keeping the pressure on. We hope to see further improvements with respect to foreign overfishing.

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the minister has been good enough to list a number of the causes for the crisis in Canadian agriculture. It is too bad he did not mention another major cause—high interest rates caused directly by this government's support of the policy of the Bank of Canada.

The minister is also telling us about the very interesting foreign trip he is going to take. I hope he enjoys himself, at least when he is in Ireland. But I want to ask him in particular why the government does not take steps to end foreign overfishing in waters that are clearly Canadian.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, in his report, Mr. Harris said that all foreign fishing activity should be stopped as soon as possible and that overfishing by foreign fleets should be terminated immediately.

Mr. Speaker, does the minister accept Mr. Harris' analysis and especially recommendation No. 6? If so, will he take the necessary action today?

[English]

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, the House is lucky that the hon. member does not have the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* with him or he would be reading that.

With respect to the question of interest rates, the hon. gentleman has probably got the greatest length of service in the House of any of us. In every year he served in government, he supported a government that supported the Bank of Canada. Through the years when interest rates went to 22 per cent and 23 per cent that hon. gentleman supported the Bank of Canada and supported the then Liberal government. Why does he come forward with such a hypocritical question, Mr. Speaker, when we are carrying on a tradition he started?

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the minister a similar question dealing with the farm issue and the totally pitiful response the government made on Friday.

Mr. Speaker: This exchange has gone on for quite a long time. I would ask the hon. member to be as direct as he can.

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, does the minister not realize that the government has already cut close to \$10 billion in transfer payments to the western provinces?

Does he not realize that agriculture is clearly a federal responsibility because of the international situation?

Does he not realize the program announced on Friday is going to discriminate against the smaller prairie provinces because they simply cannot afford the matching grants? Therefore in the western provinces the family farm will go down the tubes. Does the government not recognize that basic reality about the situation in western Canada?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, I know the House realizes by now that simple statements by the hon. gentleman opposite does not mean that they are factually correct. The statement alleged to be factual in that preamble was certainly not correct.

Does the hon. gentleman realize that the western provinces, for example, have a very favourable financial position with respect to servicing debt as compared to the Government of Canada, and that 35 cents out of every revenue dollar of the Government of Canada we cannot control? That goes in paying interest, mostly on the debt that the hon. gentleman racked up while he was here with the last government. This is in comparison to the position in Saskatchewan where I believe they pay around 9 cents of the revenue dollar to service their debt. In Alberta it is 8 cents per revenue dollar, and so on.

Despite this, the government spent two and one-half times more than all the provinces combined in agriculture in the year 1988-89. Does the hon. gentleman realize that? Does he realize that provinces have equal responsibility with the Government of Canada in the field of agriculture and that we are going forward with