

AGRICULTURE

SPECIAL CANADIAN GRAINS PROGRAM—INITIAL PAYMENTS TO FARMERS

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture and concerns the farm debt crisis. The FCC has indicated that some 39,000 farmers are in serious financial difficulty. Because only 30 per cent of the Special Canadian Grains Program will be paid in January or February, the average producer will only receive about \$1,500 out of the initial payment of \$5,000. Can the Minister tell us how many of the 39,000 farmers in serious financial difficulty will be saved from foreclosure or bankruptcy by this initial payment of \$1,500?

Hon. John Wise (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the most accurate way to answer that question would be to say probably about 99 per cent more as a result of the election of September, 1984, in which this Government was elected, rather than repeating the lack of programs under our predecessor.

Mr. Foster: Mr. Speaker, the Minister is suddenly very non-specific.

FARM CREDIT CORPORATION FORECLOSURES—REQUEST FOR EXTENSION OF MORATORIUM

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, since the lion's share or 70 per cent of this special payment will not be made until the new fiscal year, perhaps April or May, is the Minister prepared to extend the moratorium on FCC foreclosures until the full payment has been made?

● (1440)

Hon. John Wise (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the matter of lifting the foreclosure is one that is very much on my mind. We are under a great deal of pressure from those people who have managed extremely well, and who are in a fairly strong and stable financial position to expand their operations.

On the other hand, we know that it would cause some serious problems to those who will not be able to survive, even though we do have the farm debt review legislation, and the farm debt review boards which are now operating. In addition to that, we have the Canadian Rural Transition Program.

The Hon. Member might take some satisfaction from the fact that we will do everything possible to ensure that those people who will not be able to succeed in the business of farming are able to make the transition as painlessly as possible.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

INQUIRY WHETHER RETIRED ACTIVELY SEEKING JOBS WILL BE REIMBURSED

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Employment and Immigration.

The Minister of Finance in April, the Prime Minister in October and now the Minister of Employment and Immigration have all stated that the Government was not undertaking a review of the unemployment insurance system to reduce federal contributions to the unemployed.

In this optic, will the Government reimburse the benefits of the early retirees whose entitlement was cancelled if they are actively looking for employment and are still on the labour market according to Statistics Canada?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, the policy for those who are looking for a job, and we said this last week, is that those who can find a second job will be able to re-establish their eligibility. As for those who receive a pension, as these pensions are deemed to be employment income, they are deductible from the amount insurable for unemployment insurance purposes.

REQUEST THAT ALL RETIREES BE TREATED EQUALLY

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary.

Will the Minister put all retirees on an equal basis so that people like Mr. Roland Cloutier of Quebec City, who is President of the *Association des retraités sans assurance-chômage*, will not be refused their unemployment insurance benefits even though they have submitted, as he has done, over 150 job applications since being forced to take an early retirement?

Is it fair to exclude from unemployment insurance benefits people such as Mr. Cloutier who are working so hard to find a job?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct a misunderstanding among members of the public. People who receive a \$6,000 or \$7,000 pension are entitled to unemployment insurance benefits up to the maximum amount of their contributions. This means that someone who has contributed a maximum of \$15,000 would receive up to \$19,000 in income, which would include his pension as well as his unemployment insurance benefits.

However, what you are suggesting is that someone with a \$40,000 pension receive an additional \$15,000 in unemployment insurance benefits, which would give him a \$55,000 income. This makes no sense and this is why pension benefits are deemed to be income from employment.