

Oral Questions

He pointed out again, as I know, the particularly vulnerable situation in which farmers find themselves because of depressed grain prices, which is why the Minister of Agriculture and the minister of trade are in Geneva at this point in time. We have an historic opportunity to try to break the pattern of the suicidal European versus American trade distorting subsidies which deprive Canadian farmers of their share of the market, and also depress commodity prices here at home.

Even though we have provided, as I think the premier acknowledged, an unprecedented amount in favour of producers, Canadian prices still remain just about at levels of 1962. The farmers' costs have gone up and the prices remain depressed. While we came up with I think some very good programs and a large amount of money, I indicated to the premier that when the Minister of Finance returned I would meet with him and the Minister of Agriculture to see if perhaps some programs could be structured in a way that would be of greater benefit to the farmers.

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is for the Prime Minister.

Yesterday I met with a gentleman from Gull Lake, Saskatchewan, who told me that the average age of farmers in these rural municipalities is now 61 years old and that 56 per cent of the farmers in that municipality are facing foreclosure. I think what we have here, Mr. Speaker, is a national emergency, a national crisis.

I wonder if the Prime Minister can now do the right and proper thing and signal to the farmers that there is some hope, that he will make sure when he talks to his Minister of Finance very shortly that there will be an emergency extra \$500 million for the farmers of prairie Canada. Please do that, Sir.

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of Western Economic Diversification and Minister of State (Grains and Oilseeds)): Mr. Speaker, no matter how much money the government puts out in this situation, somebody is going to say it is not enough. We know it is not enough. There are people who are having difficulty meeting household expenses off their farm income and that is not a pleasant situation for anybody.

Let me again point out that there is a record amount of money going to be available to all farmers across the country in the grain and oilseeds business by June of next year and it is not all gloom and doom. There are some positive signs that prices are increasing. We just raised initial payments for malt and barley this week.

There are some positive signs in the wheat market. With a record crop and the program that we have in place to assist the Canadian Wheat Board as well as other agencies in the country to sell grain, we are in a good position to move the record crop and as prices increase it is going to mean more cash for farmers. There are some signs out there that there are some positive things happening.

Mr. Stan J. Hovdebo (Saskatoon—Humboldt): Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Prime Minister. Is the Prime Minister's indication yesterday and again today that the government would look for more funds to assist farmers just a ploy to send the coalition farmers home with a glimmer of hope or is he actually serious about recognizing the farmers' needs for more money now?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I happen to be Prime Minister of a government that has increased assistance to western farmers by 650 per cent and has provided more aid to western farmers than any other government in the history of Canada. We have always stood by the Canadian farmer. We will continue to do so.

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[Translation]

THE CONSTITUTION

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. I am a Canadian outside Quebec and, like so many Canadians, I want to have a chance to say yes to Quebec. There are thousands of Canadians outside Quebec who want a chance to restore Quebec's confidence in our country. Will the Prime Minister give Canadians outside Quebec who still believe in a renewed country a chance to say yes to Quebec in a national referendum?