

that if man can use his skills and talents to survive the natural elements that give us prairie winters and drought, then surely man can use that same intelligence to ameliorate the violence of the market economy.

Whether one views the market as a natural or a man-made phenomenon, one cannot dispute the logic of their approach. Perhaps that explains the history of political and economic activism that generated from our region and why I am honoured to have been chosen by my constituents to carry on this long, honourable and necessary tradition. I hope to be equal to the task.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Althouse: As we begin this Parliament, Mr. Speaker, I think that it is important to spend a moment considering some of the leftovers from previous governments which affect the agricultural industry. The hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom), in his role as agriculture critic in previous parliaments, has raised a number of matters which have yet to be addressed. The Minister of Agriculture recently tabled the report prepared by the National Farm Products Marketing Council concerning the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency. Our party will be asking for an opportunity to examine this report along with the annual report of CEMA in the Standing Committee on Agriculture.

The former minister of agriculture, the hon. member for Elgin, established an interdepartmental committee to examine the effect of hydrogenated trans-fatty acids in margarine upon the health of Canadians. We will be expecting a report from this group to the appropriate committee of this House at the appropriate time in the upcoming session of Parliament.

In 1978 the current and then Minister of Agriculture established an interdepartmental committee to examine allegations concerning the toxicity testing by Industrial Biotest Laboratory of many of the major farm chemicals used in Canada. It is our understanding that an interim report of this committee has been completed, and we will be asking that it be tabled by the minister in the House at the earliest possible opportunity. We continue to view this situation as being of serious importance indeed.

Finally, we have been promised by successive ministers of the environment that a national land use policy will be established across our country. It should set out at the very least a policy for the use, purchase and sale of federal lands. This affects our Indian people, ranchers, farmers, and users of recreational land and it should therefore be dealt with quickly. We will continue to pursue this issue in the House and in the appropriate committee. Our party cannot understand the delays and stalling in producing any sort of document outlining a national land use policy.

After that brief outlining of some leftover issues which remain with us, Mr. Speaker, I would like to look at some of the issues that are of prime importance to agriculture today. The biggest of these concerns is the crisis of high interest rates. High interest rates are sapping the strength of every sector of

our economy, but nowhere are they more strongly felt than in the agricultural community.

Next week we will see two mass rallies and demonstrations held in Ottawa demanding emergency action on interest rates for farmers. The National Farmers Union will be on the Hill on Tuesday, and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture will be in the Chateau Laurier on Thursday to show their concerns over this crisis. Why are these farmers coming to Ottawa? They are coming because of the combination of chronically low prices for many commodities, the rising prices for fuel, chemicals, and fertilizers—all of which are oil or natural gas based—machinery and high land costs make the additional burden of increased interest costs intolerable.

The president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture points out in a recent issue of *Farm and Country* that interest rates have almost doubled since 1978. Many farmers are paying 19 per cent on their floating loans for operating capital. And what about the federal Farm Credit Corporation, the agency set up to provide long-term debt financing? Interest rates there have gone from 10 per cent in March, 1979, under a Liberal administration to 12 per cent under the Conservative administration, and now it is 13 per cent under the Liberal administration again. The number of loans in 1978-79 actually declined, in over-all amount and in number of loans, over 1977-78.

The Liberal government had been starving the FCC of funds, and while the hon. member for Elgin increased the capital to the FCC by \$50 million during his term in office, this still amounts to a drop in the basket. Farm debt is increasing at a rate of about \$1.5 billion per year. The amount of farm debt has tripled from 1968 to 1978, going from \$4.1 billion to \$12.3 billion in those years. Certainly a massive injection of capital is needed to rejuvenate the Farm Credit Corporation.

As a concrete step to allow young farmers to continue to get into farming and to allow other farmers to make major investments, this government should have frozen the interest rate at 12 per cent. Instead, we see in the Speech from the Throne increases in the farm improvement loans ceiling to \$100,000 which prompted the Canadian Federation of Agriculture to say, "more rope to hang yourself".

The current interest rate for farm improvement loans is 18.5 per cent. In 1978, first estimates indicated that \$212 million was loaned under this act. That amounted to only 2.7 per cent of the total credit extended to farmers in that year. Some banks provide almost no funding under the Farm Improvement Loans Act. Most farmers will tell you that no matter what bank you go to these loans are hard or nearly impossible to get, even at the rate of 18.5 per cent, which is still no favour to the farmers.

It is obvious that this government will have to do much more if they hope effectively to assist farmers with the current problem of high interest rates. Farmers need help this spring to put their crops in, and we must develop programs rapidly if we are to provide the assistance they need. Accordingly, I would