

Oral Questions

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, of course long-term planning is essential to the management of government resources.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Siddon: Madam Speaker, I take it that the President of the Treasury Board has answered "Yes".

An hon. Member: He said "No".

Mr. Siddon: If that is the case, and recognizing his responsibility to control expenditures, will the President of the Treasury Board table here and now his five-year projections so that Canadians can judge the degree of restraint which he hopes to achieve in government spending over the next five years?

Mr. Johnston: Statements will be made at a later date—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Johnston:—with respect to projections and the government's intention with respect thereto.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

* * *

FINANCE

INTEREST RATES ON FARM LOANS

Mr. Vic Althouse (Humboldt-Lake Centre): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Finance. The non-budget, budget announcements last night avoided taking action on the question of interest rates on farm operating credit, which is in part what the demonstration outside is all about.

What is the minister proposing to do with regard to interest rates on farm operating credit, in light of the emergency situation which producers face in all parts of the country, but most dramatically in the potato producing areas of the maritimes as seeding time approaches?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I believe that the questioning today underlines the dilemma which a minister of finance faces in these current circumstances. I have already been berated by members of the official opposition because of what they describe as increased government spending, and I have the hon. member proposing another expenditure program which, if applied to farmers—however deserving they may be at the present time—would necessitate the application of a similar program to other groups affected in the economy.

My purpose, as I have indicated with respect to home owners, is to attempt to develop techniques which will assist affected groups with a minimum of public expenditure, but with a maximum consideration of the hardships that individuals may face at the present time.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Althouse: Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Minister of Finance. In light of what he has just said, would the minister then provide a moratorium on all farm debts until such time as the Farm Credit Corporation could be upgraded to include, as well, the administration of the Farm Improvement Loans Act and the granting of operating credits at fixed rates under the Farm Credit Corporation?

Mr. MacEachen: Madam Speaker, for reasons which I have already indicated, it would be impossible to accept the suggestion of the hon. member at the present time.

An hon. Member: Just pass a law.

* * *

GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES

REDUCTION IN PROGRAMS TO ACHIEVE RESTRAINT ON SPENDING

Mr. Lloyd R. Crouse (South Shore): Madam Speaker, I wish to direct my question to the President of the Treasury Board. He came to my riding during the election and I would have been glad to see him if he had had the time.

An hon. Member: Question.

Mr. Crouse: Since rises in interest rates and oil import costs will increase spending by something like \$2 billion more than was forecast in the December 11 budget for 1980-81, an over-all increase of 13.5 per cent—

An hon. Member: Question.

Mr. Crouse: Hon. gentlemen keep asking for the question. It is not my fault that they have made a mess of the economy. I will get to the question in a minute, if they will just be patient.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Crouse: Would the minister indicate what departments or programs he plans to cancel in order to remain within his government's stated restraint program of keeping spending restraints below 10 per cent?

[Translation]

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, I am most flattered by the attention given me today. Frankly, Madam Speaker, I think it would be premature on my part to answer such a question.

* * *

[English]

FINANCE

PLANS TO REDUCE DEFICIT

Mr. Lloyd R. Crouse (South Shore): Madam Speaker, I have a brief supplementary question. I am not certain whether I should direct it to the President of the Treasury Board or to