

Oral Questions

Could the minister tell this House whether or not he has taken this matter up with the cabinet, or with the banks, requesting a form of favoured treatment for small business as far as interest rates are concerned? If not, is the minister perhaps prepared to look again at the Small Business Loans Act in order to include working capital at preferential rates for the small businessman within that act?

Mr. Abbott: Mr. Speaker, I consider it an important part of my job to advocate to the Minister of Finance, and other ministers who have a direct responsibility for economic change, ideas such as the last one expressed by my hon. friend. But I would reiterate that if he thinks that because interest rates are going up, this government is not concerned with their effects on small and medium business, he is wrong. I think our larger concern has to be with restoring, in the eyes of the world, the stability of the North American economies. For that reason, I enjoin him and others to make certain that they take a responsible attitude toward this problem.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): We need an election for that purpose.

Mr. Jelinek: Mr. Speaker, the minister's rhetoric is not helping the small businessman. I have two questions for the minister. I ask him what, if any, steps he has taken in order to assist the small businessman in this regard. I would like to have a specific answer from him as to whether he has taken any steps, or intends to take any steps, to assist the small businessman in this specific instance.

● (1432)

Mr. Abbott: Mr. Speaker, last June certain measures were introduced to help small business. Other measures have been introduced of which the hon. member is aware. I reiterate that it is not my role to announce policies that directly affect small business. It is my role to attempt to advocate to the Minister of Finance suggestions along the line of the last part of the hon. member's previous question. I can assure him that is exactly what I am doing and will be doing in the weeks ahead.

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TRANSPORT**MOVEMENT OF GRAIN TO EXPORT POSITIONS**

Mr. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Mr. Speaker, my question to the Minister of Transport is in connection with the transportation problems that continually confront the grains industry. It arises from the statement made by a senior official of the Canadian Wheat Board that Canadian sales of export grain must be limited to 21 million metric tonnes because that is the maximum quantity that our transportation system can physically handle.

Since this is the same 21 million tonnes capacity that we had in the record year of 1972-73 which the minister refers to quite frequently, I would ask the minister how he can justify this further loss of sales, in face of the government's commitments

[Mr. Jelinek.]

at the WEOC conference in 1973 and in face of the Liberal government's commitments during the election period of 1974 which committed them to revamping the grain handling system from the granary to the ship in the harbour. Can the minister today offer any new hope to the producers of Canada who are becoming increasingly frustrated and fed up by our inability to move grain and take advantage of export opportunities?

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Transport and Minister of Justice): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I can give reassurances to the grain farmer as a producer of exports for the world. This year we have been talking about the challenge of trying to move 23 million rather than 21 million tonnes. I should emphasize that these figures were actually more than is produced in anything but an absolutely fantastic crop on the prairies in any one year. Therefore, we are able to move an amount of record production, plus some more.

The question is, how much more capacity should we have? I am one who years ago staked out the position that we must target on being able to move a billion bushels of grain rather than the 850 million or 870 million bushels I am talking about now. I believe that is still very true. It is for that reason we have been buying hopper cars and rehabilitating and rebuilding branch lines in a very important way. We have been getting a far faster turnaround time on our equipment, as the Snavely report will show as soon as it is available to hon. members. We have a study now under way in relation to the total question of the parts of the system used for operating and moving grain more quickly. Obviously, while we want to go on moving more, we want to do it efficiently and at the lowest cost.

Mr. Mazankowski: Mr. Speaker, surely the minister knows we have had to defer 1½ million tonnes of grain exports from the last crop year to this crop year, and that further deferrals are taking place in this current crop year with respect to movements out of Thunder Bay. The minister should also know that the Canadian Wheat Board had to turn down the sale of four million tonnes of grain into the export market. The minister should also know that we have a situation—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Does the hon. member intend to put a question?

Mr. Clark: He is answering the minister's question.

Mr. Speaker: I was not aware, to answer the Leader of the Opposition, that it was a function of the questioner to answer the previous question.

Mr. Mazankowski: The minister's statement cannot go unchallenged.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I am not asking that anybody's statements go unchallenged. This is a period for putting questions.

Mr. Clark: And receiving answers.