

Supply

● (1610)

I would like to see him do it today because the Department of Agriculture reduced the Farm Credit Corporation's estimates from \$494 million last year to some \$90 million this year. If the farmer in the Hon. Member's constituency had a 13.5 per cent or 14 per cent loan he would not have been able to offer that. He certainly cannot offer it today and the only reason he was able to get that assistance in the previous fiscal year was that the Liberal Government provided a large enough estimate to make such a flip possible.

I was interested to hear the Member say that the former Minister of Agriculture had no interest in agriculture. I have heard much criticism from the Tory Members about Eugene Whelan but I have never heard anyone, any place say that Eugene Whelan was not interested in agriculture. I think that no one worked harder, as a Member of Parliament from 1962 to 1984 or was more committed to the interests of agriculture in this country than the Hon. Eugene Whelan. I believe everyone on all sides of the House would agree with that.

The Hon. Member talked about the Farm Finances Review Board. The Hon. Member for Bruce-Grey (Mr. Gurbin) is here today and he was very instrumental in appointing the chairman of the pilot project. I certainly want to commend the people from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and other commodity groups who took part in that project. I know some of them and I am aware of the great amount of effort they put into that pilot project.

However, after talking to people who served on the Farm Finance Review Committee, I was disturbed to hear them say that the main problem was that the Farm Credit Corporation was not willing to write down any of their loans to farmers. They said that they were stymied without the Minister's support. Although the Minister is supportive to the extent of providing some funding to set it up, he certainly was not willing to make the commitment to change the policy or regulations of the FCC to make it work.

Although the Minister has imposed a moratorium on FCC loan foreclosures, I have not seen anything that has taken place in that regard, apart from his announcement in early July that he would set up a pre-foreclosure arbitration procedure. The Minister is conducting another review of the Farm Credit Corporation policies. A rather extensive review was conducted last February and March in which we made recommendations about the farm debt crisis. Members from all sides in that committee worked very hard to recommend a series of assistance measures for farmers facing foreclosure or bankruptcy. We waited all spring for the Budget—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I regret to interrupt the Hon. Member.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I notice that the Hon. Member has used about eight of the ten minutes in which I would have a chance to respond to his comment. The implication of what he said is how can the Government do anything if it has not put in more money.

If the Member will consider what we have done he will see that we are getting much more for our money than his Government ever did. Who was it that was able to cut interest rates on farm credit loans? Who was able to abolish the capital gains? Who established the shared risk mortgage? Who has contributed to the Canadian economy in such a way that we have seen interest rates decrease to record lows today? We have been able to get the bang for the buck. The Minister of Agriculture and the Government have succeeded in making the best possible use of our resources. We should be proud of that record.

The Hon. Member talked about the former Minister of Agriculture and said he worked very hard. I will not deny that. I do not know what his work habits were and he may well have worked very hard. However, I think he must be measured by what he accomplished. From the point of view of what I saw him do for the Peace country, he may as well have saved his time and not bothered coming to work because it did not accomplish anything. If the Hon. Member was honest, he would admit that he is doing nothing more than nit-picking the Government because even he must be impressed with the record of our accomplishments.

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex-Windsor): Mr. Speaker, I must say that it is remarkable to hear a speech like that given by an Hon. Member from the Peace River country. Perhaps it makes the case for exchange visits throughout our country. I could certainly lead the Hon. Member into the pleasant countryside of Essex County and introduce him to a few people who would do nothing but nit-pick about the record of the Government.

This past summer we had a meeting in Essex County to look at the record of the Government for its first year and specifically at the Budget which had been brought down by the Government in May. That hall was filled with farmers who had voted Conservative and had in fact elected the first Conservative Member of Parliament from Essex County—the Essex-Kent constituency—in 25 years. There was one word stated in that hall to describe the Budget. That word was “betrayal”. Those people did not whisper that word, they did not simply speak it, they shouted it. They felt that they had been betrayed on virtually every topic which led them to vote Conservative that previous September. Whether it was gas tax, support for the Department of Agriculture, whether it was a serious moratorium on farm credit, new sources of finance through agri-bonds or all those things that had led them to vote Conservative, their judgment was betrayal.

These were not people who had voted for me. They were not people to whom I felt I must listen with the special sympathy that one saves for people who were your original supporters, these were people who voted Conservative because, frankly, they believed the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney). I must say that they no longer believe him. They believed in a Conservative Government. I must say that they no longer believe it. They believed in the Conservative promises and that, above all, they believe no longer.