

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I recognize that the hon. member probably has not read all of the reports that we have seen in the last few days.

But the fundamental basis for them saying we must get interest rates down is to get the deficit down. If my hon. friend has some ideas on how to get the deficit down, let him join in the public debate. Let him—

Some hon. members: Resign.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Moose Jaw—Lake Centre.

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AGRICULTURE

Mr. Rod Laporte (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture. Prairie farmers are not able to sell their grain. Thousands of bushels are in danger of simply rotting on the ground. Farmer and rural bankruptcies are up by 25 per cent over last year. Every western MP can tell tragic tales about constituents in his or her riding. Western Canada is in a recession.

When is the government going to provide some real assistance to prairie agriculture instead of rhetoric. We need help now.

• (1440)

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's question and recognize the serious problems that agriculture is facing in western Canada in particular.

As the hon. member knows, we did provide some \$500 million worth of emergency assistance in the spring. We had hoped that that would be matched by the provincial governments. Unfortunately, it was matched in part only but I think has gone some distance in helping farmers get their crops in. We now have a record crop and it is causing congestion. Several alternatives are being looked at.

However, I want to remind the hon. member that this problem has been with us for quite some time. We are trying to deal with the issue at the GATT negotiations, to try to bring some order out of the chaos in the interna-

tional marketplace. We are working very diligently on a long-term safety net program.

I am sure the hon. member will be pleased to know that I am looking very favourably at the reinstatement of interest-free cash advances, provided it can be linked into a long-term solution to the problem.

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake): A supplementary, Mr. Speaker. The policies that the Minister of Agriculture is talking about today are not doing anything to alleviate the immediate farm financial crisis. I find the discussion about the reinstatement of the interest-free cash advance to be in order. Members of his own party have been talking about reinstating the interest-free cash advance.

Can the minister tell us today that by the end of this week interest-free cash advances will be available to western Canadian farmers so that they are not at bay with the banks at the immediate time?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I did indicate that we were giving the matter urgent consideration.

Also I would like to remind the hon. member and his colleagues that this morning the Prime Minister, myself and other members of Cabinet met with Mr. Dunkel, the head of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade who is in Canada at the present time working in a co-ordinated effort to try to bring some order out of the chaos that exists in the international marketplace.

The Prime Minister is the one who brought agriculture to the top of the agenda of the GATT and he should be applauded for that. We now have an opportunity to address the long-term situation which will not only serve us in the long term but will serve us in the immediate term as well.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. John Harvard (Winnipeg St. James): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance who was warned last spring by western premiers about a made-in-Canada recession. They used that term, made-in-Canada recession. They warned him about the use of high interest rates, the lack of confidence in his policies and the imposition of the GST, which would only worsen the condition of the western economy.