

Oral Questions

Mr. Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

WORLD FOOD CONFERENCE IN ROME—REASON FOR COMMITTING CANADA TO SUPPLY ONE MILLION TONS OF GRAIN

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the right hon. Prime Minister and it is with regard to the proposal made in Rome by the Secretary of State for External Affairs concerning aid in the form of grain. I should like to ask the Prime Minister why it was felt sufficient for the Canadian government to make a proposal to increase our grain aid to a level that is still well below that of 1970-71 and 1971-72 although the need and the general level of starvation has greatly increased? We like to look at OPEC countries and suggest that they have created great problems by increasing the price of oil, but we must recognize that there are great problems for food importing countries by virtue of the increase in the price of grain.

● (1420)

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, may I reply to this question as Acting Secretary of State for External Affairs. The various countries present at the world food conference were asked to make pledges. They were asked as a collectivity to pledge ten million tons of grain annually during the next three years. The government of Canada looked at this request very carefully and came to the conclusion that a proportion that would indicate Canada's willingness to help would be 10 per cent, which is about one million tons per year. Never in the past, of course, have we supplied one million tons a year every year for three years. It may be that we will be able to supply more, but we felt that was a constructive contribution to the world food conference and one we hoped other countries would follow.

Mr. Stanfield: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I should like to ask the Acting Secretary of State for External Affairs whether the decision to make the commitment for one million tons a year was based upon an estimate of the inventory surplus or some other consideration?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, as I have explained, it was based upon the request to which we were responding and as I say, if we are in a position to supply more than one million tons out of our surplus, we have not closed the door to that. We felt we should make a positive response, however. No other country in the world has made as positive a response as Canada has to meet this world problem.

Mr. Fairweather: They have not spoken yet.

[Mr. Reid.]

WORLD FOOD CONFERENCE IN ROME—GOVERNMENT POSITION ON PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A GRAIN BANK

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the opposition): One further supplementary, Mr. Speaker, relating to the attitude of the government of Canada to the proposal that a grain bank be established by the food exporting countries. Are we to take it that the Secretary of State for External Affairs has committed Canada to this proposal? Has the government of Canada endorsed this idea and has it prepared concrete proposals on how such a grain bank could be established?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I think I would prefer to wait until my colleague returns from Rome. Negotiations are continuing and I know he has instructions to do everything that Canada can do to help meet the very serious problems now facing the world. It is probably the most serious problem the world has ever faced in this field.

An hon. Member: Why don't you lend-lease Otto?

WORLD FOOD CONFERENCE IN ROME—POSSIBILITY OF CURTAILING OTHER AID PROGRAMS TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL FOOD AID

Mr. Jack Murta (Lisgar): Mr. Speaker, my question is also to the Acting Secretary of State for External Affairs. Since the Secretary of State for External Affairs has stated in Rome that the government has allocated some \$50 million out of our total aid spending to cure what he calls food problems in the world, may I ask if that involves any increase in the government's total aid budget? If it does, what existing aid programs is the government contemplating cutting to provide the additional food aid?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, this question was examined at great length in this House, in cabinet and in cabinet committee. An undertaking to supply about one million tons of grain annually, if it is in the form of food, represents an enormous increase in the funds put at the disposal of the countries of the world for food aid. We have been looking at the rest of the program to see whether this would involve us in having to cut back within the limits that we have established for our aid programs as a whole. We believe it will be possible to finance this increase in food aid within the three year period providing we can, with the support of parliament, increase the total amount of aid by perhaps 15 per cent each year.

WORLD FOOD CONFERENCE IN ROME—POSSIBILITY OF CANADA SUPPLYING FERTILIZER AND OTHER AGRICULTURAL AIDS

Mr. Jack Murta (Lisgar): May I ask a final supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. As the President of the Canadian International Development Agency has been quoted as saying that Canada, because of inflation and rising prices, will not be able to provide as much aid to third world countries as was provided formerly, and as fertilizer is in short supply in underdeveloped countries, will the Acting Secretary of State for External Affairs say