

The Budget—Mr. Benjamin

It is economic stupidity. Our grain producers are damn efficient and grow the best quality grain of any country in the world. They do not mind competition on a fair and equitable basis. However, when they are asked to compete against the Treasuries of the U.S. and the EEC countries, then that is the time for the Government to step in. That is the point we are making. If everything is equal, they will not ask for anything.

It is not just I who am frightened. I reflect a heck of a lot of frightened grain producers, as the Hon. Minister of Agriculture found out just a few days ago.

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member is quite right. They asked for 10 cents or 20 cents more a bushel, but who is going to put it up? It was the Government, and that is a subsidy. As well, there is no change in the situation at all today. There are so many people out there who need grain and all sorts of other things that there is no need for us to back into a circle in order to protect ourselves. You have living proof of that in Europe where they subsidize their farmers to the degree that they are the most unhappy farmers in the world. You think we have trouble in western Canada? Go to France and see trucks lining the road with \$12-a-bushel wheat. Why are they so unhappy? It is not hard to find out why when you talk to them. You start spending money like mad and your costs go up. Cost input is the biggest problem we have today with farmers. The point that I was trying to make in my main remarks was that our main job is to get at the first element of those costs, which is the interest rates. The interest rates are 10, 20 times more important when you are talking about giving a subsidy to farmers. If you put this fairly to the farmers, who are pretty fair people, I know what the answer will be.

● (1600)

Mr. Benjamin: Mr. Speaker, I will agree with my hon. friend that input costs have been a major problem, whether it is interest rates, fertilizers, sprays or farm fuels. If the Government wants to be really helpful in this Budget it will abolish all excise and direct and indirect taxes on farm fuels; it will abolish any and all federal taxes on other input costs, whether it is fertilizers or sprays; it will allow the immediate implementation of the sale and dispensing of generic farm chemicals and will cut the price at least in half. If my good friend wants to move some amendments to that effect in the Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs or in this House in Committee of the Whole, my colleagues and I will be most happy to support him, and, I suspect, so would a lot of other Members on all sides of this House. If he can persuade the Minister of Finance to do the very things he has just been complaining about, boy, you will hear me applauding him and the Minister of Finance—I will be first in line.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Debate.

Mr. Penner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, since the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Before the Hon. Member for Cochrane-Superior (Mr. Penner) starts, I think I should have recognized first the Hon. Member for Huron-Bruce (Mr. Cardiff), if the Hon. Member has no objections. By unanimous consent may we revert back to the Hon. Member for Huron-Bruce and then go on to the Hon. Member for Cochrane-Superior?

Mr. Penner: Mr. Speaker calls the shots.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): With unanimous consent from the House, I now give the floor to the Hon. Member for Huron-Bruce.

Mr. Murray Cardiff (Huron-Bruce): Mr. Speaker, I thank you and my colleague in the Opposition for allowing me to speak at this time. This is a Budget that I am very pleased to speak about. I know that Canadian farmers, indeed all Canadians, have waited anxiously for this Budget. I do not feel we have let them down in any way. It would be most difficult to have a Budget that pleases everyone. We have come a long way to meeting some of the needs and we are endeavouring to meet all of the needs in the future.

I would like to read into the record an article in the *London Free Press* written about Ontario Treasurer Robert Nixon. The article reads as follows:

Ontario Treasurer Robert Nixon said he supports the aims and objectives outlined in the federal budget but will have to wait and see whether Finance Minister Michael Wilson's various financial moves will achieve the desired results.

"I want to join with him, frankly, in hoping that his announcements are going to achieve what he said they would—that is, bringing down interest rates, reducing unemployment and giving us real growth," Nixon told reporters after listening to Wilson's budget announcements.

He resisted pressure from reporters to describe the budget as good or bad for Ontario, but his initial reaction to Wilson's initiatives was generally supportive.

He was critical of federal Government policies which in recent months allowed interest rates to rise to the 13-per-cent level. He said this had been a "wet blanket" on the provincial economy.

"We're hoping those interest rates will fall in the next few days to the 10-per-cent level," Nixon told reporters.

Despite tax increases year after year both federally and provincially, Nixon said he could make no commitment that his next provincial budget in early May will not also reach deeper into the taxpayers' pockets.

He went on further to say as follows:

Although he shared some of Wilson's objectives, Nixon saw a danger of Ottawa and Ontario developing overlapping programs and duplicating bureaucracies. For example, a new federal program to help tobacco farmers diversify into other crops was "well intentioned" but similar to provincial assistance.

That is an area where we have to be cautious. We do not want to duplicate services already provided by a provincial Government. A situation such as we have in the tobacco industry in Ontario makes it somewhat easier to help them through those problems.

The Budget asked Canadians to understand the need for restraint and deficit reduction. The Budget still goes an extra mile for Canada's farmers. Canada's farmers had some big setbacks in the last few years. I think what really started a lot of it was high interest costs. Not only farmers but all Canadians have suffered some hardship because of high interest rates.