

Agriculture should be put in charge of this particular aspect of environmental and health concerns.

It frequently occurs that a particular subject matter falls within the purview of several departments. We attempt to put the minister who is more directly concerned in charge.

The Minister of Agriculture is presently attending the World Food Conference. He is frequently available in the House, and he will be happy to deal with hon. members' questions as soon as he returns.

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THE ECONOMY

INCREASE IN RESIDENTIAL MORTGAGE INTEREST RATES

Hon. John C. Crosbie (St. John's West): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. In a speech which I gave a week or so ago I advised the public not to blame Governor Bouey but to blame the government which got us into this mess, and which will do nothing to get us out.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Crosbie: On October 29, 1979, the present Minister of Employment and Immigration was the housing critic for the party in opposition at a time when mortgage rates were 11½ per cent—8 per cent lower than they are now. At that time he said this:

If there is a requirement to raise interest rates, there is an equal requirement to help those people who are hurt by those interest rate increases.

That was the policy of the Liberal party on October 29, 1979. Interest rates have risen 7 per cent to 8 per cent since then, and mortgage interest rates are hurting hundreds of thousands across the country. When will the minister observe the requirement to help those people who are hurt by these interest rate increases and who did not cause them?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I think I answered that question in reply to a question put by the Leader of the Opposition.

Miss MacDonald: When did you answer a question.

ASSISTANCE TO HOME OWNERS

Hon. John C. Crosbie (St. John's West): Madam Speaker, the minister is giving us more gibberish from Gabon. The minister's policy is the Gabon policy—return to the jungle. Is that his advice to Canadians?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Crosbie: All we need are tree houses and we can swing from tree to tree!

My question to the minister is this: on March 11, 1980, the minister said that the federal government will consider special assistance to home owners if interest rates soar under the new

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floating rate approach. Interest rates have now gone up 5 per cent more than they were in March of 1980.

I have in my hand a letter from a man whose mortgage is at 11.25 per cent now and will be raised to 19 per cent—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Crosbie:—he has already stopped buying groceries, clothing—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Crosbie: My question to the minister is: here is one of thousands of Canadians, who has cut down spending on groceries, clothing, maintenance—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Crosbie: What action will the minister now take to carry out his commitment?

Madam Speaker: I am sure the hon. member heard me call Order. I must remind him that when I do call for order he must resume his seat and find out why—

Mr. Crosbie: We cannot hear you because of the din by members opposite.

Madam Speaker:—I am calling him back to order. I think the hon. member knows his question has been a bit lengthy.

Mr. Crosbie: When will the minister take action to carry out that commitment made on March 11, particularly in view of the fact that housing starts in Newfoundland, for example, will be down 25 per cent this year from the housing starts forecast?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, once again I want to remind the hon. member, as I reminded the hon. member for St. John's East, that there has been a very sharp increase in housing starts, both in urban and rural centres in all parts of Canada.

Mr. Crosbie: That is the past.

Mr. MacEachen: The hon. member says that that is the past. I am talking about the month of April, 1981, which showed an increase of 50 per cent, which showed a very substantial increase in housing starts over April of 1980.

The hon. member has quoted statements which were made more than a year ago about the interest rate situation which existed at that time. The hon. member knows that at that particular time we monitored the situation very carefully. We entered into discussions with financial institutions, and arrangements were made by the minister responsible for Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to assist where required. The fact of the matter was that because of the very rapid increase in incomes which took place between the original negotiation for the mortgage and its renewal, the problem