

Oral Questions

Monetary Fund? Has the government decided to what level the dollar should be allowed to float before such intervention is sought? Indeed, have discussions been held with the International Monetary Fund with regard to possible support?

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, there has been no such discussion with the IMF. I was in Washington, and I met with the officials there. There was no suggestion that Canada should be forced to go to the IMF. We have a lot of credit available to be gained.

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ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS**WITHDRAWAL OF WEATHER SHIPS' SERVICE ON WEST COAST**

Mr. Donald W. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the minister of the environment, I will address my question to the President of the Treasury Board. It refers to the decision to withdraw weather ships off the west coast. I ask the President of the Treasury Board whether safety at sea was fully evaluated as one of the criteria used in deciding whether those weather ships should be withdrawn. At the same time, can he tell us what other alternatives were considered before that decision was taken, such as closing regional offices in the atmospheric services?

Hon. Robert K. Andras (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, the elimination of the two Pacific weather ships was based on information that the replacement technology would be in place and would be totally satisfactory. There are discussions with regard to a thorough examination of that situation. I can assure the hon. member that before a final action or a decision is taken we will have satisfied ourselves as to that safety factor being in place. If it is not there, we will reconsider the situation.

● (1452)

Mr. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Mr. Speaker, my information is that the technology for unmanned buoys at sea is not ready and will not be ready for three or four years. In view of the fact that notices have already been served on the crews of those weather ships, can the minister tell me for sure whether that decision has been taken? It looks very much as though it has, and I wonder whether alternative sources of savings have been considered. There are regional offices there which are not operational: they are line offices and merely post offices between the operating end and—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Andras: Mr. Speaker, I find the final comment of the hon. member very constructive and interesting and I shall examine the possibility of whether or not there is a requirement for alternative savings to be sought. However, as to the Pacific weather ships, I think if the hon. member reads again in *Hansard* what I said, it will confirm that that decision is

[Mr. Oberle.]

being examined because of the absolute importance of providing safety measures to the people concerned.

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AGRICULTURE**WITHDRAWAL OF CANFARM SERVICES**

Mr. John Wise (Elgin): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Agriculture: it relates to the decision of the government to withdraw completely financial support from Canfarm services. What progress has been made by the government to date to ensure the continuation of this service to some 20,000 or 25,000 Canadian farmers by some other method or perhaps by some private firm?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the hon. member is aware that there have been meetings with farm organizations in Canada, with banks which use the system and with the computer people who rent or lease computers to the government. I am very optimistic that this system will be continued, and probably in a much broader fashion than it was before.

Privatization is part of the program of the government. It is our intention to get out of as many of these programs as we can. We were not in a position where we could advertise these programs because I felt they competed too much with the private sector. However, if it is taken over by the private sector—which I am very hopeful will be the case—this tremendous service can be offered not just to farmers in Canada but also to other agricultural producers. We will be exporting this tremendous service.

Mr. Wise: Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the government is not in a very good position to guarantee this service to Canadian farmers beyond March of 1979. In view of that, would the government consider a fee increase to the membership of Canfarm sufficient to eliminate the cost to the government, at least until such time as a solution can be reached?

Mr. Whelan: Mr. Speaker, we will do our utmost to have this transfer take place before the end of this year, because some of the farm programs have to begin January 1. It is not just a matter of when our fiscal year ends, but we will do everything humanly and financially possible to make sure that this worthy organization stays alive.

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POST OFFICE**NEGOTIATIONS TO PREVENT STRIKE**

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Postmaster General. In his absence, perhaps I can direct it to whoever is responsible at the moment for the postal mess.

An hon. Member: They all are.