

Farm Credit Act

• (8:40 p.m.)

[English]

Mr. Horner: Mr. Chairman, I should like to make a few comments on the bill which is now before us. I was particularly pleased to see the farm improvement loans legislation pass through the house this afternoon. I wish to comment that the measure of worth of the Minister of Agriculture will depend on how low he can convince his cohorts to set the interest rate and still have the banks lend money. We on this side of the house will watch very closely the formula that derives and how successful it is.

I should like to take exception to what has been said by the hon. member for Shefford, who has just spoken, when he suggests that we in this party voted for higher interest rates on this very point. We voted to establish a formula so that the interest rate could go only so high. The government did not accept the suggestion; I suppose it thought our formula was too low. However, we voted for the measure in an attempt to encourage the banks to lend money to the farmers so that they could make a profit, and not necessarily so that the banks could make a profit. We were in no way concerned whether the banks made a profit or not, but we were concerned about the agricultural industry. I think my friends on this side dealt with that point quite extensively.

I am a little disappointed because the minister proceeded with this legislation. Forgive me for saying so, but over the Thanksgiving week end I made an extensive tour of central Alberta. I can only say that I was depressed when I saw the weather conditions as bad as they were. The farmers have not turned a wheel for two weeks; crops are still lying out in the weather. There is snow in some fields, while other fields are too wet to enable a machine to get on them at all. I am a little disappointed that the minister did not bring in the cash advances legislation before the farm credit legislation, because the one represents immediate cash and the other represents long term credit.

Mr. Olson: We have it ready to go on with immediately.

Mr. Horner: I realize the minister is prepared, but I was somewhat concerned this afternoon when he said that this legislation must go through, and hinted to the house that he has used up all the time his government will allow him for his farm legislation. I was a little disappointed when he threw out the

[Mr. Rondeau.]

hint this afternoon about his time running out. In earlier days the minister had the whole department; now it is split into three sections under three ministers. One would think that three ministers would command some position in the government and that agricultural legislation would not be allowed only a limited number of days.

Mr. Olson: We have had priority of time that has been available.

Mr. Horner: I would hate to think that we were hamstringing in dealing with as important an issue as long term agricultural credit. This is an important issue, because certainly, when one considers the plight of the farmers today and in the immediate future he can only say that credit must play a major part in the revamping of the whole agricultural industry.

Clause I of this bill defines a farmer as one whose principal occupation is that of farming. In answering a question of the hon. member for Kent-Essex the minister said that we must acknowledge the fact that farmers should be encouraged to join together in order to compete better with vertical integration. Where has the family farm gone? Has it become non-existent; has it passed from the sight of all politicians, including the Minister of Agriculture? Why is this legislation not primarily for the purpose of strengthening and enlarging the family farm?

Mr. Olson: It is.

Mr. Horner: Why is it necessary for us to become involved in the whole complex matter of joining farmers together? Have we admitted that the agriculture industry is beyond hope unless the farmers band together? I would like to think this is not so. On June 4 the *Winnipeg Free Press* quoted the Prime Minister as saying this:

The government proposes to amend the farm credit legislation to provide for broadened applicability and to stimulate the entry into the industry of younger people. These amendments would provide increased coverage for farmers desirous of acting in partnership, would improve the ability of farmers to enter into agreements with their sons—

An hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Mr. Horner: This is a quotation from a speech by the Prime Minister. I hear somebody over there saying "hear, hear". I am glad that someone in the Liberal party agrees with my interpretation of someone else's remarks, because sometimes I am accused of misinterpreting their remarks. This is what