

Oral Questions

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, the hon. member knows that there is some legislation that may help farmers. For instance, the meat import bill is before the Standing Committee on Agriculture at the present time. If it received speedy passage and came back to the House before the end of June, it could be law before many days pass. It is up to members of the committee to deal with the legislation that is before them in committee.

MINISTERIAL SPEECHES

Hon. John Wise (Elgin): Madam Speaker, the farmers of Canada have a very descriptive term for the minister's words, but I think it is unparliamentary so I shall simply refer his answer as sheer and utter nonsense. The minister travels across the country and when in one province he is going to amend the Bank Act; in another he is going to amend the Income Tax Act; then he is going to bring in amendments to the Small Business Development Bond to include the unincorporated farmer; in the next place he speaks he is going to bring in amendments immediately to the Farm Credit Act. When is the minister going to stop talking and do something?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Wise: When is the minister going to stop misleading farmers or leading them down the garden path? Again, I give the minister the opportunity to tell us when he is going to do one single thing that will help farmers with this problem of high interest rates?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, the hon. member asks when we are going to do something. I find it very strange that his party says that the economics of the nation is so important, yet they take one of their opposition days and waste it in the House of Commons, not even talking about economics. Who is the biggest hypocrite in this House? They have talked about legislation, but all they have to do is get rid of some of those foolish opposition days, and give us one of those days and we will bring some legislation forward.

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BANKS AND BANKING

MINISTER'S MEETING WITH BANKERS

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Finance. After his interesting meeting with the bankers association the other day, the bankers emerged saying that the impact of high interest rates on farmers and home owners was not as black as it had been painted. It certainly is not bad for the banks which are having record level profits.

Considering that the banks did not come up with one specific suggestion to help either home owners or farmers, could the minister tell the House whether he took a specific proposal to the bankers that they could act upon?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, the purpose of the meeting was to seek the co-operation of financial institutions in helping individuals who may be in real difficulty in the present circumstances. I believe that was a very important request and a very important subject to discuss with the representatives of the banks. They have assured me that in present circumstances they will do everything they can to avoid the kind of tragedy that was mentioned yesterday in the question period, namely, the possibility of foreclosure.

The hon. member may realize that a year ago, at about this time, we had a very rapid run-up of interest rates and people were concerned, as I was, about the possibility of foreclosures. The fact of the matter is that because of the co-operation between the minister responsible for Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the financial institutions, it was possible for home owners who were renegotiating their mortgages in that period of high interest rates to get over the period and to maintain their homes and their payments. That is the objective that I have at the present time in enlisting the co-operation of the financial institutions.

SPREAD BETWEEN INTEREST RATES PAID AND CHARGED

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, the reality is that 1,000 Canadian families have to abandon their homes every month. The reality is that 100 Canadians go into personal bankruptcy every day. That is the result of this government's continuation of the high interest rate policy. It is time the government changed that policy, instead of coming out with vague expressions of concern.

● (1425)

Since the minister did not propose one thing specifically to help home owners or farmers, did he at least go to the bankers with another question concerning the spread between what the banks pay families who have savings accounts compared to what the banks charge for loans? This spread, as everyone knows, is one of the major reasons for record level profits for the banks. Did the minister at least say to the banks that they should reduce that spread and bring their profits down to reasonable levels?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, the hon. member has put some statistics on the record, which I find to be really quite offensive—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. MacEachen:—because of their inaccuracy. I believe the hon. member ought, first of all, to produce the statistics which support his claim that 1,000 home owners for a period of time are losing their homes. I think that is totally false.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!