

Inquiries of the Ministry

For that reason, I submit that this question is absolutely in order.

[Text]

Mr. Speaker: There were two reasons for making my last suggestion. One was that I could not see the urgency of the question, and questions on orders of the day are at the very least supposed to be urgent. The other point is that this question has already been asked, if I am not mistaken, three or four times this session.

[Translation]

Mr. Gregoire: Mr. Speaker, you are absolutely right. After twenty years of waiting, I believe the answer is not yet urgent.

[Text]

GRAIN**SUGGESTED EXTENSION OF POWERS OF WHEAT BOARD TO EASTERN PROVINCES**

On the orders of the day:

Mr. Raymond Langlois (Megantic): Mr. Speaker, I should like to address my question to the Minister of Trade and Commerce. Would the minister care to inform the house whether it is the intention of this government to extend the powers of the Canadian wheat board so that it may have jurisdiction over the sale of western grain in the eastern provinces?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Minister of Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, this would, of course, require amending the Canadian Wheat Board Act, and notice of any intention of the government to change the act would be given in the usual way.

Mr. Langlois: A supplementary question. Can the minister at least give us a little bit of hope that this might come up next session?

HOUSING**REPORTED CURTAILMENT OF DIRECT LOANS TO BUILDERS**

On the orders of the day:

[Translation]

Mr. Maurice Côté (Chicoutimi): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a question to the Minister of National Revenue. Could he inform the house of the reasons which prompted Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation to abolish direct loans to builders, whereas it was understood that loans would be granted to them up to December 31, 1963?

[Text]

Hon. J. R. Garland (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, in view of the interest of this subject perhaps the house would permit me to make a short statement by way of explanation.

[Mr. Gregoire.]

To encourage a high level of house building activity during the winter months, the government on September 23 authorized Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation to extend its lending program to builders. Previously, direct government loans were available to builders only if they found buyers in advance of building. In September this restriction was temporarily removed.

I am happy to report that the new lending policy has been highly successful. Up to November 15 the corporation received loan applications for 13,147 houses. Nearly 4,000 of these applications were made in the last two weeks. This is not only the largest fortnightly total since the start of this particular program, but it represents the largest volume of direct mortgage lending ever undertaken by the corporation during a comparable period of the year. It creates a loan potential of close to \$160 million.

This lending potential ensures the success of the \$500 winter incentive program of my colleague the Minister of Labour. It also guarantees a much higher volume of building this winter than ever before in our history. I would be surprised if we went into the new year with less than 90,000 new houses under construction. Indeed, the figure could be higher. By contrast, last year there were 76,000 houses under construction at year end.

These two government programs have provided a tremendous impetus to employment in the building trades and other associated industries. So much so, in fact, that it is now debatable whether the industry is capable of undertaking a larger building program than that already being financed. If more direct loans were made, some builders might find that shortages of skilled labour would prevent them completing their housing in time to qualify for the \$500 winter building incentive.

Because of this situation, Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation has instructed its offices not to accept further applications for speculative loans after close of business November 15. I should like to stress this point; builders, of course, can still obtain N.H.A. financing from approved lenders, and they will continue to be eligible for direct loans for houses sold in advance of construction. The corporation will also make loans to home owners. In effect C.M.H.C., having achieved the government's objectives, has simply reverted to the policy which existed prior to September 23.

I think the house will agree that this special winter lending program has been an unqualified success.