

while in the United States they actually went down 1.9 per cent.

In short, Mr. Speaker, the government has got to start coming clean with this House. It has to start giving answers on why inflation is rising notwithstanding its so-called anti-inflation program. It has to show why we are in such a stagnant position compared to our main trading partner, the United States, and it has to show what its new contingency plan to stop inflation in this country is going to be. Clearly the program it outlined in 1975 is not working but we cannot get from it today any indication of when it plans to terminate the wage and price control program. We can get no indication as to whether it plans to use more or less fiscal restraint, more or less monetary restraint, but we have these figures piling up month by month showing that our economy is in a very serious condition.

● (2210)

Typically, this government rather than re-evaluate its own shortsighted policies has chosen instead merely to revise its goals. What else can you read into the comment made by the minister last Tuesday when he was asked a straight question as to whether we were going to achieve a 6 per cent goal, and he said, no, but he hoped that the new target of 7 per cent would not be achieved? In short, the policy of ministers opposite seems to be: if at first you do not succeed, lower your sights. It is time the country was rid of them.

Mr. Hugh Poulin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for York-Simcoe (Mr. Stevens) is quick to criticize, notwithstanding the fact that it has been ably demonstrated in the economic performance of the past period since the AIB program has been in effect that the program had been effective in reducing rising prices and in reducing the rising cost of wages, which he says very emphatically has been one of the major causes of our lack of competitiveness on the world scene.

Are we going to meet the expectations of the 6 per cent or 7 per cent increase? Are we going to ensure that it does not exceed that? Every effort of this government is devoted to ensuring that that is accomplished and that that end is met. We have presented programs. This government, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Macdonald), and the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Chrétien), have presented programs that have worked well. Our rate of inflation has increased, but other indicators have decreased in the past months and years since the program has been in place. In all the rantings and ravings that some hon. members from the other side have engaged in, I have not yet heard any constructive program offered by the hon. member for York-Simcoe as his party's financial critic.

Mr. Stevens: Read the April 4 speech, you damn nut.

Mr. Poulin: The recent appointment of the new chairman of the AIB has indicated that the program will not end by the end of 1977 because the expectations of Canadians have not decreased to the level where we can expect voluntary restraint

in the corporate, management, and labour sectors. Until that happens, we will have to continue the type of program with which we had a measure of success in reducing the rate of inflation.

Mr. Stevens: Give us the figures.

Mr. Poulin: I would like to hear from the opposition their program on fiscal policy which they would put in place—

Mr. Stevens: Read the April 4 speech.

Mr. Poulin:—and when they would withdraw the AIB program which has been so effective. People in the private sector are saying that now they are able to go ahead and plan, they are able to price, quote, and bid, and know they are not going to be outpaced by inflation which had been running rampant. This has been a successful program, and I would like to hear an alternative.

AGRICULTURE—POTENTIAL DROUGHT IN WESTERN CANADA—
SUGGESTED DISCUSSIONS WITH UNITED STATES ON JOINT
ACTION

Mr. Bert Hargrave (Medicine Hat): Mr. Speaker, my reference in the adjournment debate is last March 9, as recorded at page 3798 of *Hansard*. That was the occasion when the issue of the serious drought in western Canada was first raised in the House in a series of questions by my leader and by myself addressed to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan). Hon. members may remember that that was the first time that the critical drought situation was mentioned in parliament. It has been raised many times since, including today's question period when by coincidence my questions to the same minister were essentially on the same subject, namely, the drought in Canada.

I am sure hon. members will recall that on the first occasion on March 9 the minister's response to our plea for immediate emergency action was to ask all members of the House to pray for rain. I am sure all of us who fully appreciated the extent of the drought crisis did indeed pray for rain, and are not ashamed to say so. This was the same minister who, two and a half weeks later, according to a feature article carried in the Canadian *Week End* magazine, said in a speech he delivered at Tilley, Alberta, that the free market system is as outdated as Jesus Christ, and almost as redundant.

Last March 9 the minister was more than a little uneasy and touchy about my drought questions, and he was equally uneasy and touchy today when I raised the same subject. His completely evasive answers on those occasions were exceedingly disappointing to me, as they were, I am sure, to every farmer in the extensive drought belt of the west. Surely the Minister of Agriculture knows that this serious drought is a non-partisan, non-political issue. It is much too serious to make quips about or to joke about, and one cannot assume credit for the first rain of any consequence to fall in over nine months. Mr. Speaker, the first significant amounts of rain fell last night and today on most of the western Prairies.