

Minister of Finance, who tells us today that any reasonable request will be examined? Does the Minister of Agriculture intend to make any request to the Minister of Finance to provide some assistance to that particular area, either alone or jointly with the Province of Saskatchewan?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member knows the procedure, I am sure, which is generally followed, that those people within the Province of Saskatchewan who feel they have suffered a hardship because of weather—and in this instance it was mainly because of the weather—must appeal first of all to the Province of Saskatchewan. If that province feels that is too large for them to look after—or any province, for that matter—under the system we follow, then the Province of Saskatchewan must appeal to the federal Government to co-share the responsibility. So far I have not received that kind of representation from the Province of Saskatchewan. I do know that the Senator in charge of the Wheat Board is supposed to be in that area, I believe this week, making a personal inspection and listening to complaints, which I am sure the Hon. Member has already done.

Mr. Korchinski: The Minister knows full well that the Special Recovery Program is in federal hands. He does not need any assistance from any province on that one.

WESTERN GRAIN STABILIZATION ACT—AMENDMENTS SUGGESTED

Mr. S. J. Korchinski (Mackenzie): Would the Minister tell the House whether any consideration is being given to introducing any amendments under the Western Grain Stabilization Act, something which the Senator in charge of the Wheat Board is touting as a possibility? Is there any consideration being given to introducing amendments immediately, in view of the fact that the situation exists there now, without waiting for any province? The Minister can do that now if he wants.

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, first of all I want to answer the insinuation made by the Hon. Member that we changed the policy we are offering to people. It has been in front of them for years in Canada. If there is crop insurance available for crop losses, neither the province nor the federal Government becomes involved in those programs. The Hon. Member is asking us to supersede that with some other kind of new policy. If crop insurance is not taken out, there is no way that the province will ask us to assist it with those kinds of losses suffered because of weather.

Concerning the Western Grain Stabilization Act, yes, we are reviewing it. The review is not finished with respect to suggestion made by many people, including people from both sides of this House, as to how that Act should be changed to make it more realistic. I do not have that final report as yet from my Department. I am sure that, if there are amendments, the Hon. Member will have concurrence of his colleagues to give the measure speedy passage when it does come before the House.

Oral Questions

FISHERIES

BANKS' TREATMENT OF WEST COAST FISHERMEN

Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox-Powell River): Mr. Speaker, my question is also directed to the Minister of Finance and it pertains to the West Coast fisheries. The chartered banks on the West Coast, as the Minister will know, have been operating a virtual reign of terror against West Coast fishermen, seizing vessels, stacking up homes as guarantees against vessels, then seizing the vessels. Today I sent a letter to the Minister which would indicate that the banks are threatening those fishermen whose vessels, homes, and guarantors are being squeezed, that confidential financial information will be released about those fishermen in order to intimidate them. Will the Minister commit to this House that he will ask the banking officials to inquire into this situation immediately and find some relief for fishermen who are being squeezed by what are probably the most powerful agencies in this country?

● (1450)

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I just received a copy of the letter the Hon. Member sent me across the floor. I have not had time to take cognizance of this particular letter, but I will certainly read it with care. As he knows, in the past we have made representations to the financial authorities when it was felt they were exercising excessive zeal in some instances. I will certainly examine these particular instances, and I would be very happy to inform my friend of what steps we could take.

INCREASE IN FISHERMEN'S COSTS

Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox-Powell River): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that for the recipients excessive zeal could only mean a reign of terror over the last three years. One of the serious problems in the West Coast fisheries is the continued rapid increase in costs resulting from the federal Government increasing fuel taxes, interest rates, moorage charges—a whole range of financial impediments to fishing on the West Coast created by the federal Government.

The excise tax on fuel is about to increase from 9 per cent to 10 per cent. Will the Minister commit to this House that it will not increase, that in fact he will roll it back? Will he meet with a delegation of fishermen to hear their representations on those matters and the mechanisms which could be put in the next Budget in order to relieve some of their financial burden? Would he make those commitments today in the House to those fishermen?

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the NDP could have been very helpful in containing costs in Canada by supporting the programs put forward by the federal Government to reduce inflation, particularly the six and five program which they objected to consistently, and which has been a considerable factor in reducing inflation in Canada.

As far as the Hon. Member's representation on the excise tax is concerned, I have to tell him that the plan to increase