

FARM FORECLOSURES—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Agriculture. He started his own form of capital punishment for farmers yesterday when he announced he will start foreclosing on tens of thousands of farmers this Friday.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Foster: Can the Minister tell us why he is starting these foreclosures now? This is being done just one week after he reduced grain prices by 18 per cent. It is being done after he and the Minister of Agriculture refused a deficiency payment for the coming crop year. Farmers are going to the bank to get money to put in a crop. Why is he starting the foreclosure action this Friday? Is it going to be known as Black Friday from now on?

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of State (Canadian Wheat Board)): Mr. Speaker, I would appreciate it if the Hon. Member, who has been a distinguished Member of this House for a long time, would at least get his facts correct. We are not starting foreclosure on tens of thousands of farmers. The process will involve at the most approximately 50 per month. If he does the arithmetic, that amounts to about 600 per year. We are not involved in any way in the kind of thing the Hon. Member suggests.

Let me say again that anyone affected will have the option of having their case reviewed by the farm debt review boards which have been in operation since last August. They will be of great use to many of the farmers who are going to be affected.

NUMBER OF LOANS IN ARREARS—REQUEST FOR RESCHEDULING

Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, I would just remind the Hon. Minister that when he talks about 600 farmers he knows he is just kidding everybody. There are 6,000 FCC loans which are more than two years in arrears. When they are more than two years in arrears the history has been that they never recover. Altogether there are 16,000 FCC loans which are in arrears.

• (1425)

Before the Minister puts this program into effect this Friday to start thousands of foreclosures, will he put in place a major new system to reschedule debt? Does the Minister not have any compassion? Does he not have any heart? Does he not know what is going on out there?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of State (Canadian Wheat Board)): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member distorts things wildly out of proportion. He knows very well that the total number of Farm Credit Corporation clients is approximately 76,000. Therefore, for him to suggest that there are 60,000 in arrears is absolutely—

Oral Questions

Mr. Foster: Six thousand.

Mr. Mayer: I am sorry, the figure I heard him use was 60,000.

However, he should know that the approximate number of farmers who will be affected, regardless of all the numbers he wants to throw around the House, will be in the neighbourhood of 50 per month.

Mr. Blackburn (Brant): How would you like to be one of the 50?

Mr. Mayer: That means that a year from now the action which was announced by the Minister of Agriculture will affect approximately one quarter of 1 per cent of all the commercial farms in Canada.

In the meantime we are providing a substantial amount of financial support. For instance, to repeat, there will be approximately \$1.3 billion of federal tax money going into the western grain economy in the next five weeks. In my opinion that does not indicate a Government which is unconcerned and shows lack of compassion for the farm community. It indicates exactly the opposite and most farmers realize that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

REQUEST THAT GOVERNMENT DECISION BE CHANGED

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. He knows that the figure to which the Minister has just alluded is to pay farmers for last year's crop. He knows that his Government has made no commitment to bringing in special assistance for farmers who are now putting this year's crop in the ground.

His decision to go ahead with foreclosures on Friday will mean that some 600 farms are immediately in danger. Since 25 per cent of Canadian farmers are on the verge of bankruptcy, will the Prime Minister intervene directly, change the Government's decision, and put an end to this policy which the Government wants to inflict upon Canadian farmers on Friday?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of State (Canadian Wheat Board)): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Leader of the New Democratic Party says farmers need cash for seeding now. That is exactly what we are doing. We are providing cash for them now.

Mr. Broadbent: That's not what I said.

Mr. Mayer: Well, the Hon. Member now wants to take it back. I wish he would know what he wants to ask when he phrases his question.

However, I will repeat that there is a substantial amount of money going into the pockets of western Canadian farmers right now at a critical time of the year, which is exactly the