

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member is aware that according to banking practice—in fact, it is the practice of all lenders in our society—if the borrower defaults on his payments, the lender is entitled to take possession of the property that was given as collateral. Is my hon. friend suggesting that we should have a situation in which we would not only prohibit the lender from allowing the former owner to continue to occupy, for instance, a farm, but also oblige the lender to sell the property to someone else? I think that solution would be far less humane than the one being considered at the present time. This approach, while leaving the lender's rights intact, authorizes the lender to make certain adjustments and eventually, if and when the borrower's economic situation has improved, the latter can be given a chance to buy back the operation he was running before.

[English]

MEASURE TO REINSTATE FARMERS' CREDITORS ARRANGEMENT ACT

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops-Shuswap): Madam Speaker, I agree with what the Minister has to say in terms of the technicalities of the situation, but he says that he is interested in helping and he hopes that the situation will improve. It is within his ability to improve the situation immediately by promoting Bill C-653, the Farmers' Creditors Arrangement Act, which would prohibit the banks from foreclosing on farmers, in an effort to leave the family farm in place and the food producers of Canada in place, yet make an equitable adjustment between the borrower and the lender. That ability is now before the House, if the Minister simply takes action with his Cabinet colleagues and has that Bill brought forward.

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I think I have already made it clear that the Government is very sympathetic to the Bill that was tabled in the House but there are a number of technical problems that arise in connection with the implementation of the Bill, and that by trying to help people who are in difficulty, we may be creating further problems for a great many farmers, and that is why the implications of such measures must be examined very carefully. I would therefore say to the Hon. Member that before we take the action he is suggesting, it is better to be fully aware of its implications.

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[English]

THE ADMINISTRATION

CAPE BRETON COAL AGREEMENT—MEMORANDUM SEEKING FORMER MINISTER'S COMMENTS

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Yellowhead): Madam Speaker, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources will know that the document dated January 15, the memorandum from Mickey

Cohen to the then Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, had a memorandum in handwriting to Mr. Michael Phelps appended to it which asked for the Minister's comments directly. Can the Minister tell us what comments the then Minister of Energy made in relation to that request, and what action the then Minister of Energy took, having been brought to a state of knowledge that the conflict of interest guidelines had been breached? What was said by the former Minister of Energy? What was done by the former Minister of Energy?

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Madam Speaker, I was not present at the discussions, so it is difficult for me. I did not question the former Minister of Energy about all the meetings he had, and about what he did or did not say. The House asked me to table documents and I tabled them. It is impossible for me to transmit verbal communications.

REQUEST FOR REPORT TO PARLIAMENT

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Yellowhead): Madam Speaker, since the question concerns when exactly the present Minister of Finance came to the knowledge that conflict of interest guidelines had been breached, since that is an important question, and since it is important for us to know what he did when he knew that the conflict of interest guidelines were breached, will the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources find out what the former Minister of Energy said, what his comments were, and what he did after the conflict of interest had been brought to his attention? Will he report to the House at the earliest possible time?

● (1500)

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Madam Speaker, I do not believe the question was well put, because in the minds of those who sit on this side of the House, and in the mind of the Minister of Finance, the former Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, there was no conflict of interest and there were no guidelines broken. Everything has been done above the table.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Chrétien: Everything was made public. Hon. Members opposite might disagree with that fact, but I just say that there was no breach of guidelines. The Hon. Member may say that, but the House of Commons, in a vote last week, rejected his view.

Mr. Clark: There was a conversation earlier as the definition of responsible government. An honourable Government is one which honours its own conflict of interest guidelines, which this Government consistently refuses to do.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!