

Oral Questions

FREIGHT RATE SUBSIDY

Mr. Vic Althouse (Humboldt-Lake Centre): Madam Speaker, with that commitment, why does the Minister support the current Crow rate changes in light of the fact that the proposals do nothing about the current top loading that exists of some \$40 per tonne plus an additional \$8 per tonne leased railway car subsidy which the Province of Alberta is paying to the rapeseed and canola crushing industry in that Province, which has virtually shut down crushing in Saskatchewan and Manitoba? Why is top loading so unacceptable to red meats but not in the oil seed crushing industry?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): That is strictly a provincial program that I have very little to do with, Madam Speaker. If I were having a program for all of western Canada for canola production, I certainly would not condone that kind of action. It appears to me that Alberta wants to take over the canola industry. It can do it by financing it in the way it is doing it now.

AUDITING OF FARMERS' INCOME—MINISTER'S POSITION

Mr. Jack Shields (Athabasca): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Agriculture. I am sure the Minister realizes by now that the Department of National Revenue is targeting farmers for audit this year in order to determine whether they are full time, part time, or hobby farmers. This is at a time when the income of farmers is at an all time low and their expenses are at an all time high.

Has he made representations to the Department of National Revenue on behalf of the farmers who have to go out to work and who are now being downgraded from fulltime to parttime, and indeed as hobby farmers in some cases, because they have to take another job to survive in the farming community at this time?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member knows as well as I that farmers are very ambitious people. If they can do two jobs they will do it. In my constituency, 80 per cent of my farmers have other occupations besides farming. They have fulltime jobs, they are academics, they are professional or semi professional people, factory workers, and others.

I am as concerned as anyone in the House about the rules and laws by which we have to abide. The rules and laws concerning taxation come under the Minister of National Revenue. Some of those Members make out like they are saints looking after the people of Canada. Some of them have done no more than to make a lot of noise about it when their own provincial Governments have taxing systems that are just about as unfair.

Mr. Shields: None of us on this side of the House are making us out to be the saints or upholders of farmers. We are the upholders of fair play.

REQUEST THAT MINISTER MAKE REPRESENTATIONS ON ISSUE

Mr. Jack Shields (Athabasca): Madam Speaker, I would suggest to the Minister that farmers are now being audited and agriculture is an industry that has been targeted by the Department of National Revenue. They are being audited because some of them have had to take jobs off the farm just to survive on the farm. It is the responsibility of the Minister of Agriculture to help the farmer, and surely he must recognize that. Will he take his responsibility and make representations to the Department of National Revenue to cease and desist, and end this horrible situation that exists in the farming community because of the Department of National Revenue's action?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member knows that I am as law abiding a citizen as he is. The laws are such. For him to try to say that the farming population is being singled out any more than any other business operation in this country, is just not so. Audits took place with the fishermen and they are going on with the fishermen at the present time, as well as with farmers and other small business people in Canada.

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FINANCE

SAINT JOHN HARBOUR BRIDGE DEBT

Mr. Bob Corbett (Fundy-Royal): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Finance. I gave the Minister notice of this question some weeks ago. He will recall that the Auditor General recommended in 1976 that the Saint John Harbour bridge debt be forgiven and the bridge be turned over to the provincial authority which is now willing to accept it. It has imparted that information to the Department of Finance in successive years. Is the Minister now prepared to take a decision that is positive to the Province and forgive that debt on the Saint John Harbour bridge?

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, that matter is under review.

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[English]

PARLIAMENT

SENATE REFORM—PRIME MINISTER'S POSITION

Mr. Girve Fretz (Erie): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Right Hon. Prime Minister. He has been musing about making the Senate an elected body. Does he have other electoral reforms in mind before the next general election?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, the matter of Senate reform is before a joint committee of both the House and the Senate. It is following its course there. I attach a great deal of importance to that committee