

Oral Questions

would have indeed increased the price of diesel fuel to farmers by much more—

Some hon. Members: No, no.

Mr. Lalonde:—than has been provided by the last Liberal budget. There is no doubt about that.

Mr. Clark: That is another falsehood.

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HOUSING**ALLEGED CRISIS CAUSED BY ECONOMIC POLICIES**

Mrs. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Madam Speaker, my question to the Minister of Finance concerns the housing disaster in Canada which now affects almost every Canadian. What is the minister going to do about young couples who now have to decide not to have families because they will never own a home, workers who cannot move to areas of economic growth because there is no accommodation, tenants who are paying over 50 per cent of their income on rent, and people that he knows well are losing their homes because they simply cannot afford 16 per cent mortgage interest rates? What is he going to do about increasing housing starts which are at an all-time low, and about speculation which in Vancouver and places like St. John's has increased prices by about \$10,000 a month?

I repeat, Madam Speaker, what is the minister going to do about this crisis which is created by his economic policies?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I am aware of the trends in housing starts in Canada. I am aware also of the impact upon housing starts of interest rates which are obviously serious in their effect. I would point out to the hon. member, however, that in addition to the impact of higher interest rates on housing starts there is the fact that there has been a very large and spectacular build-up throughout the 1970s in Canada's housing stock. There has also been a decrease in family formation in Canada, so undoubtedly we would expect something of a downturn in any event.

I would remind the hon. member that throughout the country there is a variation in the number and intensity of housing starts. For example, in 1980, because of the very strong demand for housing in British Columbia, housing starts increased, I believe, by 40 per cent.

Mrs. Mitchell: A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. I wonder if the minister is also aware that in Vancouver the cost of a simple, three bedroom home is well over \$160,000, which no one can afford, especially the younger people. Although the minister is not willing to do anything about high interest rates which have discouraged the building of rental accommodation as well as new homes, and since we know that few families can afford homes, which means that the only alternative is non-profit housing, which is the only affordable

housing in Canada today, will he increase now—not in the summer, as he did last year, which was too little and too late—the budget for non-profit and co-op housing?

● (1450)

Mr. MacEachen: Madam Speaker, there is no formula by which I can automatically increase the budget, even for such a deserving and worth-while program as the one the hon. member mentions. There is a cabinet committee which is responsible for allocating funds of a fixed sum within the over-all framework of social development. I will ensure that her representations are considered by that committee to see whether it is possible to free up funds for other purposes for the programs she has in mind.

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ADVISORY COUNCIL ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**ALLEGED GOVERNMENT PRESSURE TO CANCEL CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE**

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, my question is to the minister responsible for the status of women. It concerns a press release put out earlier today by Doris Anderson, who has provided two previous governments with excellent advice of an independent nature as chairperson of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. Given that Mrs. Anderson has charged that the government is pressing the advisory council to cancel its constitutional conference scheduled for February this year, will the minister advise what possible reason he has for interfering with the work of an independent council other than the fact, as stated in the press release, that he is afraid that that constitutional conference might embarrass the government?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, I was very surprised to read the statement of Mrs. Anderson. It really is not a very accurate or proper statement of what transpired. Let me tell the hon. member that the idea of a constitutional conference held by women in Canada originally came from myself, was recommended to the advisory council, and the discussion held last week was at their request. They were concerned that in view of the impending announcement of changes and proposed amendments to the charter of rights, which would take into account some major representations made by women, the next step in the discussion by women about constitutional matters would be broadened to embrace a much wider range of people.

In my response to that request I suggested that if they intended to hold a conference on a regional basis over the next six months, a second round or range of discussion concerning matters dealing with federal-provincial relations and the jurisdictional question might be of far more value at that point, considering the debate that has already taken place. That debate has had a very successful result in the sense that the advisory council made its case very clear.