

Government Orders

difficult time. It is very disappointing, I have found that the minister introduced this bill knowing full well that they were coming for some time and has not put a moratorium on foreclosures, at least until this bill takes effect. In fact, this government would do a great service to rural Canada if it would stand up today and announce that all farm foreclosures will not be proceeded with until such time as this program had a chance to take effect, to allow farmers to keep their land.

• (1050)

There are many farmers who are simply hanging on, literally by their fingernails. It is important that they have a stable income.

Another aspect with farm financing is, of course, interest rates: We in the farming communities need stable interest rates. It is very difficult for many farmers. There are many senior farmers and there are numerous farmers who would like to retire from the land, who would like to leave the land, those who are getting close to retirement age, and many who are past retirement age. I run into farmers all the time who are well into their seventies who say they would like to get off the land but who really have no mechanism, no way of getting off the land. They cannot get rid of their land. Nobody can afford to buy it; the interest rates are too high.

We need a mechanism to set in a whole new generation of farmers so that in 20 years we are going to have a viable farming community. Therefore, we need a mechanism that is going to allow senior farmers to get off the land and allow younger farmers to get on the land.

That has not been addressed. There has been no indication of changes by this government with respect to that objective. It is not that we are short of alternatives; in fact even Jim Hewitt, the chairman of FCC, has made some very valuable contributions with respect to that matter.

Along with a strong incomes program, which I hope this bill will allow, we also need a strong national finance policy. It has to be a program that takes into account rural Canada—that is the key factor, that is the important factor that we have to take into account.

I would say this in concluding; we need a national policy, both with respect to income and farm finance, that recognizes the ultimate importance of a healthy industry to rural communities right across this country. Policies and programs must be available to assist farmers in realizing a return on their investment and labour comparable to that of other industries, so that an industry based on family control and family-operated farms can be maintained. That is the key element, that is the underlying issue. Certainly on this side of the House we will be calling for some changes to this legislation that are going to set out those principles and commit the government to moving toward developing programs that have that as a fundamental objective.

This bill allows for such an income program to be put in place. The question is, will the government achieve that desirable objective? That is the question that has to be dealt with and that is the question to which we await, with great anticipation, an answer.

Mr. George S. Baker (Gander—Grand Falls): Madam Speaker, I would like to say just a few words about this legislation presently before the Chamber.

Of course, we are debating the principle of the bill; in other words, the principle of income stabilization in the primary industry of agriculture.

The question has been put in many different ways concerning our primary producers because, of course, everybody realizes that they are perhaps the most important economic element in our society that keeps our balance of payments in the right order. They contribute more than other sectors of our economy because what they are producing is food, a most important commodity in today's world.

In thinking about the principle of this legislation, we have seen various attempts by governments over the years to stabilize incomes of farmers, fishermen and other primary producers. However, these attempts to stabilize incomes through measures such as crop insurance or, in the case of the fishing industry, the Fisheries Prices Support Board, all have one major drawback.

An assessment is made of the year and then the Government of Canada, through the mechanism of legislation, enables those primary producers to receive some compensation. The compensation is given after the fact. It does not profit somebody very much, for example, if they are about to lose their home and their property, and they are told by the legislators that what they passed