

Supply

really cost nothing. All the Government had to do was exchange one level of interest rate for another.

I would point out to the Minister that there were some 5,600 farmers who were eligible for that program. They had to sign an incredible document stating that they were on the way to the poor-house and they were going broke. If they did not sign the document they would not receive anything. If the Minister would come clean he would admit that there were 6,800 farmers holding farm mortgages at 13.5 per cent or 14 per cent who at the same time received nothing. I think we have to take what he says with a grain of salt.

If we look at the Tory promises we will see that they promised that the Government would allow the Farm Credit Corporation to offer agri-bonds to farmers in order to have access to reasonably priced funds. The Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs held hearings on this matter at which people from across the country were heard. The committee recommended an agri-bond program with an 8 per cent interest rate up to \$300,000 in order to write down all the high interest rate loans for a period of five years. I did not see any action in the Government's Budget in that regard. As a matter of fact, if one looks at the Estimates for the Department of Agriculture with respect to the Farm Credit Corporation one will see that the Estimates decrease from \$494 million to \$90 million. That is not something which took place last fall; it is something which took place in February when the Estimates came down. If we look at the budget of the Department of Agriculture we will see that it has been cut by \$50 million. We see that increases over the next several years will be restrained due to the deindexation of departmental budgets which will just cost more money.

I would say that the difficulties are growing greater and that the number of farmers in serious financial difficulty has increased by some 5 per cent from last summer to this. That is from about 33,000 farmers to 39,000 farmers. The Departmental estimates of the Farm Credit Corporation suggest that those accounts which were past due at August 1 have increased to \$236 million. Last year it was \$165 million. It is estimated that by January 1, 1986, the number of farmers who will not be able to make their payments to the Farm Credit Corporation will increase and overdue payments will amount to \$300 million. That is an increase of \$190 million from last year.

● (1540)

We hear the Minister talking, but we do not see very much action. There was not very much action in the Budget or in the Estimates. Last July 10 the Minister put out a statement that he was going to put in place a pre-arbitration tribunal system attached to the Bankruptcy Act. Since then there have just been studies. I put a motion before the House calling upon the Government to implement some action in that regard. Many groups like the National Farmers Union and others are recommending some action.

There was a Bill in the House of Commons in June, 1984, before the election campaign. It was not a case where the

Government had to go and find a new Bill, it just had to come forward with the legislation which was already there.

A question was put to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Côté) this week. He replied that the committee was still studying the issue and that we may get a Bill in January or later on. It is very indefinite when there is going to be some action taken. We can compare this inaction with the promises which were made in the election campaign. Promise No. 14 was that the Government would allocate the necessary funding to assist producers in refinancing their loans at current prevailing interest rates. But where are the 6,800 farmers who were left last January with interest rates at over 13.5 per cent? Their loans were not financed down to 9 per cent or 10 per cent. What happened to the recommendation which was made by the Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs? The majority of Members on that committee were Government Members. They knew what needed to be done. But there has really been no action taken by the Government on that recommendation made by their own private Members.

Mr. Benjamin: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Hon. Member for Algoma (Mr. Foster). In listening to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise) and to the Hon. Member for Algoma, I was reminded of a story of the farmer who was on a train. When he went to the washroom there was a sign above the toilet which said: "Do not flush in town". The farmer said: "Oh, sure, do it to the farmers again".

A year and a half ago the Conservatives were making the same kind of speech the Hon. Member for Algoma made today. As year and a half ago members of the Liberal Party were making the same kind of speeches the Conservatives are making today. I would like to ask the Hon. Member for Algoma, with all of his complaints, if he can assure us, on behalf of the Liberal Party, that it has now changed its mind and will admit that it was wrong. Who was it that got rid of the Crow rate and increased costs for producers in western Canada, with the supine acquiescence of the Tories? Who was it that abandoned thousands of miles of branch lines and increased the cost for producers? Who was it that sat quietly by while the United States closed the borders on us on cattle, hogs and number of other commodities? Who was it that started the user-pay principle which hurt agricultural producers all over this country? Who was it that tried to get rid of the Maritime Freight Rates Act and the Atlantic Region Freight Assistance Act? This all resulted in falling agricultural prices and falling farm net income. Can the Hon. Member now say that his Party has now changed its mind and admits it was wrong, and that the Tories were right in what they said while the Liberals were in power? Can he just tell us that?

Mr. Foster: Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin) who is a long time friend and member of the most illustrious class of 1968, obviously dreams of the possibility of his Party being able to be the Government of this country but he is not likely to see that happen. I want to assure the Hon. Member that if the