

Oral Questions

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

REQUEST FOR UNILATERAL FEDERAL ACTION

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Despite their posturing and that rhetoric, Mr. Speaker, social housing remains an acute problem in Vancouver and in parts of British Columbia. If the Minister of Labour is unable, on his visit to Vancouver, to achieve an agreement with the provincial Government, will he insist on unilateral federal delivery of social housing programs to alleviate the acute shortage and the hardship in Vancouver?

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, the initiative taken by the Government has been to increase the number of social housing units in Canada over the previous administration's policies.

Ms. Mitchell: You turned down Expo housing.

Mr. McKnight: We will be doubling the number of housing units available to Canadians in need over what the previous program delivered.

In 1985, Mr. Speaker, we increased the numbers in British Columbia by 23 per cent, and this year, if we can come to an agreement, we will increase the number of social housing units by 60 per cent over what was accomplished by the previous administration.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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● (1420)

AGRICULTURE

REDUCED INITIAL GRAIN PRICES

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister. I want to ask him about the devastating blow to the Canadian farm economy as a result of the announcement yesterday of the very low initial prices for wheat and barley. In effect Canadian farmers are being asked to accept 1978 prices when they have to face 1986 costs.

Is the Prime Minister prepared to announce a major deficiency payment to help farmers survive, as recommended by the advisory council of the Wheat Board? Is he also prepared to organize a major meeting of all the grain exporting nations so that we can come up with a plan which will not make Canadian farmers the casualties of an agricultural trade war?

Mr. Benjamin: You wouldn't know a bushel of wheat if it hit you in the face.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Look who's talking. You wouldn't know anything if it hit you in the face.

Mr. Benjamin: When's the last time you shovelled any, Ray?

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of State (Canadian Wheat Board)): Mr. Speaker, we are well aware of the severe financial problems facing grain producers, not only in western Canada but throughout the country. The Government has been very much aware of the needs of agriculture. Since the formation of this Government we have taken some 100 initiatives which have resulted in the spending of several billions of dollars. Last year the Government supported the western grain producer to the tune of almost \$1.5 billion.

With regard to the announcement made yesterday, the normal procedure would have been to follow the U.S. loan rate which went down 27 per cent. We showed support for the prairie grain economy and the other grain producers in the country by lowering prices 19 per cent. That is certainly not good news, but it shows the concern which the Government has for agriculture.

EFFECT OF PROPOSED UNITED STATES FARM BILL

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, it is a strange form of logic to suggest that yesterday's announcement is going to help western farmers. It is going to hurt them desperately.

In the Prime Minister's meeting with President Reagan during the summit meeting in Washington did he raise the issue of the devastating impact which the U.S. Farm Bill will have upon western farmers? Did he ask President Reagan for an agreement to hold a major meeting of the exporting nations so that we can co-operatively find an answer to a problem which is going to destroy the western grain economy if the Government does not do something about it?

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of State (Canadian Wheat Board)): Mr. Speaker, at no time did I say that yesterday's announcement would be of help to anyone in the country. It is bad news.

Mr. Orlikow: Answer the question.

Mr. Mayer: With regard to the Hon. Member's question, the Prime Minister has raised this issue with the President of the United States. The Secretary of State has raised it with Mr. Shultz.

Mr. Axworthy: What's the answer?

Mr. Mayer: The Minister of Agriculture has raised it, I have raised it, and the Minister of International Trade has raised it.

Mr. Axworthy: What's the answer?

Mr. Mayer: We have raised it in such a way as to enable us to continue talking to the Americans to let them know our concerns. We have not gone down there and insulted them, and