

# Canada guilty of protein robbery

by Tom Baker

"In my view food must be seen as a public resource - from production to consumption. Consumers must begin to mount an organized challenge to the corporate bias of state power in Canada."

Donald Mitchell, author of the recently published, "Politics of Food" summed up his views on the Canadian food industry with these words. Mitchell participated in a panel discussion with Bill Dascavich, regional organizer of the National Farmers Union (NFU); and Bruce Jeffery, a member of the Policy and Liaison Secretariate of Alberta Agriculture. Last Thursday, Student Forums and the Student Christian Movement sponsored this discussion on the "High Price of Food".

Mitchell described the inflation of food as a sub crisis within the general longstanding crisis of agriculture. He listed as some of the causes of this situation - inflated cost of farm land due to real estate speculation; use of food as a profit centre for the business community; and mechanization and specialization creating capital barriers that are not conducive to family farms.

"Farmers are caught in a vicious squeeze between the all powerful farm supply industry and food industry," said Mitchell. "The farmer has no organizations as do industrial labourers, to defend themselves."

According to Mitchell's research, 67% of the farm machinery industry is controlled by four companies, who "like the oil cartels control prices, setting them at whatever the market will bear". He alleged that when the international situation caused food prices to jump, the cost of farm machinery soared 17% in one month, for no reason. He blamed international food commodity exchanges who speculate on food as serving no productive purposes and only creating superprofits from the famine of others.

From his comments, Mitchell indicated that he felt Canada, as part of the "imperialist camp", is guilty of protein robbery from protein poor countries such as in Latin America. "These countries develop agriculture in the third world only to serve their home market. Canada is increasing its dependence on imports - no longer being self-sufficient in beef or dairy products."

Bill Dascavich, from the NFU, outlined what he sees as the plight of the farmer - his

dwindling numbers and his uncertainty about receiving an adequate return for his investment. He identified the out-moded eighteenth century free market economy as the key problem. He outlined how marketing boards such as the Canadian Wheat Board, under government control, can give a much needed price stability to the farmer.

Dascavich stated that farmers are not the cause of exorbitant food prices. "When I buy a bag of fertilizer or a gallon of fuel or pay my bank interest, who decides how much I will pay? When I load my cattle, pigs or grain to go to market, who decides what I will be paid?"

He contended that our

society is divided into two main distinct socio-economic groups with opposing interests. He argued that there is a tiny elite of wealthy magnates who control the fortunes of millions through their instruments of government and media. He saw in this understanding of the power structure of our society, the key to understanding the present crisis.

Bruce Jeffery, an agricultural advisor to the Alberta government, through the extensive use of graphs illustrated how the price the farmer receives for his products does not advance in correspondence to the increase cost of farm supplies or to the consumer prices.

The discussion period saw tempers flare and applause bursts, as several professors attacked statements of the panelists referring to the superprofits of the meat processing industry. When Mitchell was explaining the need for nationalization of the food industry, a particularly irate member of the audience shouted, "Why not let the government take over everything?" His query was drowned out by loud applause, from many of the thirty-odd people at the meeting.

Out of all the panelists, Mitchell went into the most detail on possible solutions to the crisis of the food industry. He illustrated how price con-

trols are impossible to enforce in a profit based economy like Canada's and that marketing boards, at best, only protect farmers from some of the ravages of the food industry and do not protect him from the farm supply conglomerates.

He alleged that an industry whose sole objective is to make profits can not provide high quality food at low prices.

The meeting ended with Mitchell's statement that the food monopolies must be nationalized at all levels, placing them under public control and organizing food production in a planned way, in the interests of the world's food consumers.

## Tory lecture, continued from page one

ment directly on these issues. He did however provide a panoramic view of the history of northern development.

Indirectly, however, he conveyed several messages to his audience. For example his opinion that representative

government will come to the north very soon is not new, but was a surprise from an authority.

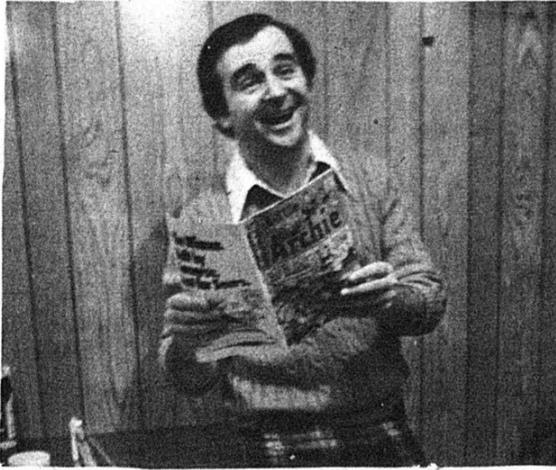
The crux of his lecture centred on two implied theses; first that native land claims would be easily settled if southerners who do not fully understand the situation would leave the north to itself and secondly that there was a great danger that the north would be

exploited and not developed.

The Damoclean sword we were all left with was adequately summed up in one of Hodgson's early statements when he said, Canadians have the choice, we are told, a choice between

treating the north as southeast Asia and China were treated a hundred years ago or we can make it a province, a part of Canada, and develop it properly and rationally. The choice is ours, it's being made NOW - which way Canada?

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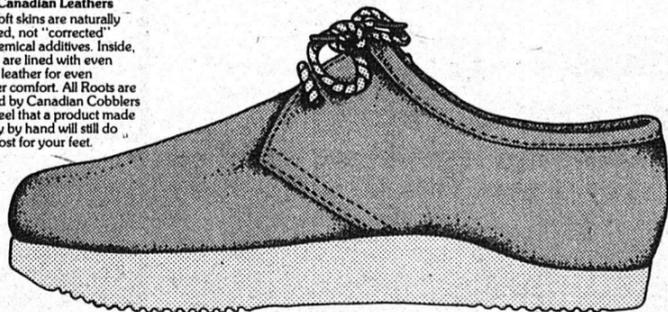
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