

If they do not have the prospect of eventually holding title to the land, they will not make the effort to have the kind of production which a person who holds title would make. For example, as an experiment, why can we not place greenhouses in the north next to hydrogenerating stations? We are burning diesel fuel by the minute up there most of the year, and there is a lot of excess heat. Some of it has been used for heating purposes. So this would be one possible avenue for the production of food in the north. We should consider some of these methods of agricultural production north of 60°. But what do we do? Some companies send their trucks over 5,000 miles to haul foodstuffs north of 60°. And they are competitive. Why? Because there is no competition. Northerners have to pay whatever price they are asked for these products. I am not saying that all foodstuffs can be produced in the north. However, I know we can do a better job and have, in fact, done a better job in the past.

There is a third reason why Canagrex should be established. This reason concerns me because this minister, who has been in the cabinet for a long time, had to use an argument which he knew would sell his cabinet colleagues on the need for Canagrex. What we have seen with members of this government, ever since they were elected, is a number of themes. One of their themes concerns the whole matter of foreign investment. Whether you see it in the National Energy Program or not, whenever one of them gets up and says they are buying back the economy, again there is almost a knee-jerk reaction. They all bow to that Holy Grail and say that is what they want to do. That was the argument used by the Minister of Agriculture for the establishment of Canagrex, pointing out that Canada's food processing plants, for example, have their output 40 per cent under foreign influence. I take that to mean foreign investment. I agree that the international food processing industry is a highly integrated industry, but I suggest that it has not been all bad. For example, one of the big giants out of Minneapolis—Cargill—has not been all bad for Canada. In fact, some of the best investments we have had in the prairies during the last few years have been from companies like that. They have put in some high put-through elevators in. Would we have had them without that influence? Would we have had the same movement of specialty crops without investments like these such as oilseeds, for example?

These are questions which need to be answered. And what I want to point out to the minister is that foreign investment is having damaging effects on our ability to sell internationally. For instance, I understand that the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Lalonde) who, incidentally, has a new name—Lalonde of Arabia—says that as he travels he finds that 70 per cent of our trade is with the United States, and that we have to change it. He comes back and says that we will get more petro-dollars from the Middle East. I ask the minister: is his government, of which he is a member, concerned about reducing foreign investment, or it is more concerned about diverting foreign investment?

An hon. Member: Nationalization.

Canagrex Act

Mr. Epp: If they are diverting from American investment, to let us say, Middle Eastern investment, I do not see how this fits in with a nationalization process or a Canadianization program.

One of the arguments the minister has been using to his cabinet colleagues is that not only do we need an export corporation but that we have to reduce foreign investment in the Canadian food industry. If that is the case—and I agree with him—then why do we not allow Canadian processors to get into that food industry? Why do we not do that? Why does it have to be government?

Let me offer the hon. gentleman an example. The previous administration in Manitoba—and by previous, I must now specify that it was the administration from 1969 to 1977—set up a number of corporations. One was known as Modern Fine Foods, a small vegetable-canning operation in the Pembina valley. It lost money, lost money and lost money. Between 1977 and 1981 the former government sold that company. I am not talking about the fact that the Manitoba taxpayers gave up that company. We sold it at a loss. The person who bought that company is a friend of mine. I know him. He is a small business entrepreneur in a small rural community in Manitoba. Do you know what he did with that company? He turned it around. He got contracts with the local farmers, and last year the production was higher than at any other time in the history of that company. More jobs were created, more sales were made and, more important, there was viability and stability. That is the kind of process I want to see.

● (1540)

I will give hon. members another example. There is a federal Crown corporation now operating in the food business known as the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation, or FFMC. The stories about the FFMC and its lack of efficiency are legend.

Mr. Miller: Talk to the fishermen about it.

Mr. Epp: I did. I will tell hon. members what they think about it, if I could be given half a minute. What did the government do first? It built a huge building. Where was it built? The Member of Parliament for St. Boniface at that time has now gone to his reward in the other place, but the government built that plant right in the middle of the prairies so that the fish could be hauled the longest distance possible. That was the first thing the government did. There was a surplus.

Mr. Whelan: Why did they build it there?

Mr. Epp: Let me finish.