

Government Orders

As I said, the first step of our program in British Columbia, was to save the land. It was not easy. There were demonstrations and hot meetings. One particular demonstration, was led by leaders of the B.C. Federation of Agriculture on the Parliament Buildings grounds. The premier came out and spoke to them. He was not listened to, but he spoke. But he was listened to when he invited the leaders of that demonstration to come into his office and talk about what they wanted, not in opposition to farmland program, but to make it possible for farmers to make a living farming the land, rather than selling it, exploiting it, developing it.

They came into his office and he offered to match anything they wanted to spend for consultants, or whatever, up to \$50,000, dollar for dollar, so they could bring in their programs. The select standing committee of agriculture at the time was instructed, or authorized if you like, to travel around and listen to farmers all over the province of B.C., much in the same way this minister listened to the farmers and farm organizations. We did the same thing.

In addition to that, my own department, as I am sure was the minister's department, was working on its program and we came up with a program that provided for a safety net. This is not unusual. But it was so widely complained about.

People talk about subsidies, and I was never more in agreement with the Minister of Agriculture of the day, Eugene Whelan, when he said at meeting after meeting: "It is not farmers who are being subsidized, it is the consumers, and it because governments are not prepared to pass on to consumers the total cost of producing food". Politically unpopular. So consumers are subsidized. Sure, it is handed through farmers on occasion, but not all the time. It is because we are competing with other nations with substantial subsidies paid either to farmers or to the community that we have to do the same thing. There is no way out. We are subsidizing the price of food so that consumers will not have to pay the full cost.

But in society outside of that, the unemployment insurance program is a safety net for a significant body of our population. There is no question about that. Professionals of many kinds, for example, doctors enter into contracts in every provincial government in Canada. They enter into contracts which provide them with a very nice safety net.

Farmers had one safety net for a long time, several decades I suppose by now, and they still have it—the Crop Insurance Program. It has been a good program. It has helped to protect them from disaster arising from what we call natural causes. We have just had a snowfall in British Columbia that started on March 1 or 2. I do not know if that is natural or not, but it is certainly nature, if not natural.

But they never have had one program that would deal with all of the problems. This, as I see it, is what Bill C-98 is trying to do: bring under one umbrella all of the programs. That is certainly the direction I wanted to go, and had I carried on as minister of agriculture after the election, then that would have been the direction I would have wanted to go, to bring everything under one program.

As I mentioned earlier, I agree totally with the principles as listed on page 3. They were the same principles that guided me in bringing in the farm income insurance program we brought in in B.C., with another one added, I think. I will come to that just a little later.

To arrive at our farm income insurance program, and again I might compare it to what the minister did, we entered first into negotiations with the B.C. Federation of Agriculture as the organization which represented the most farmers in B.C. In B.C. the National Farmers' Union was a factor only in the grain growing northeast part of the province. It was not a factor even in the Creston area, where grain was grown as well. But in the northeast corner of the prairies, that part in B.C., they were a factor and we were prepared to deal with them, but never got that done during my tenure in office. We arrived at a master contract, a cost of production contract. That is the way we looked at it. We settled the details that would apply in general to farming as a whole. After that, it was up to each commodity group to come to us and say whether they wanted to be a party to it or not. That was their choice. They came one by one and said they wanted to get into the program. There was the master contract that had been negotiated, and really it was tough negotiations, with the Federation of Agriculture on behalf of everyone, and then with the representatives. The first to come on board were the dairy farmers and I think the next were the fruit growers. The dairy farmers came in before we actually got the program organized.