

Government Orders

The erosion of the Canadian Wheat Board has been particularly hard on western Canadian farmers. The removal of oats from the Canadian Wheat Board was done without proper consultation, as was the removal of the two-price wheat system. The free trade agreement, which is going to affect the movement of grain into this country from the United States, is going to take one more slice away from the Canadian Wheat Board.

Western Canadian farmers have lost the fuel price rebate. They have had their cash advance taken away and replaced with a loan that is an interest-bearing loan. Before, they had a \$50,000 interest-free cash advance; now it is an interest-bearing one, albeit a quarter of a million dollars. With an advance of a quarter of a million dollars, I don't know how many farmers in Saskatchewan would even qualify for it, let alone be willing to take it.

They are concerned about the transportation issue, the future of the Crow benefit, and the rumours that we have been hearing here and throughout the country that there are going to be some dramatic changes made to the transportation of grain in this country. There is concern over the future of the family farm. They are concerned, with some real justification, that the direction that this government has been taking over the last seven years does not bode well for a viable farming family future.

The government says that, unlike in the past, there has been some consultation, and that is true. It certainly has been much better than in the past.

With respect to the removal of oats, the government said that it had done valid consultation. It said that it had consulted with numerous farm groups right across the country. In fact, when questioned in the House, it quoted hog producing groups, groups such as the Alberta Sheep Growers Association, which has nothing to do with the growing of oats. In fact there was no consultation with the Advisory Committee of the Canadian Wheat Board and there was no proper consultation with oat producers. A Decima poll that had been put out, which the government is fully aware of, made it very clear that farmers at least wanted the opportunity to be able to have the option to decide whether or not oats would be under the Canadian Wheat Board, just as farmers would like to have the option with other grains as to whether or

not they would be under the Canadian Wheat Board. There certainly was not consultation there.

With respect to Bill C-98 there has been some consultation, and there has been consultation with most of the major producer and farm groups in this country. The final results, however, are somewhat unclear because we have not seen the final programs. As some of the groups before the committee said, they simply have to trust that the government will come up with a valid and beneficial bill for them.

The concern that some groups have expressed—and certainly one of the concerns that I have and one of the reasons that I am unable to support the bill at this stage—is the process of review. If we are going to have a new direction for the future of agriculture in this country, there is a need for an ongoing review. What we should have is an all-party committee made up of members of the House of Commons, done as other committees are done with the same representation as is in Parliament so that the majority would be, in this case, the Tories, followed by the Liberals and then the New Democrats. But it should be an ongoing committee that can review this legislation, that can provide suggestions and alternatives to the government. As the Minister of Agriculture said, this is only the first piece of legislation with respect to agriculture. He is anticipating, and we are therefore anticipating, more bills to be coming forth. If that happens, we are changing the whole face of agriculture.

• (1830)

It is important that there is a proper review process and an ongoing review process and it is done in an open fashion, an all-party fashion. That is what I think is appropriate for this piece of legislation and for the other farm bills that will presumably be coming down.

The fact that the government is not concerned about the future of family farms is evident in that this bill is not going to protect family farms in the long term. We have in Saskatchewan I think 23 per cent of the farmers in Saskatchewan who are insolvent.

Unless we have this commitment to the family farm, unless we have this commitment to rural Canada, the erosion is simply going to continue.