

Canagrex Act

Mr. Whelan: It is healthy.

Mr. Mazankowski: The minister has no clout in the cabinet.

Mr. Epp: It's healthy?

Mr. Fennell: He is a pussycat in cabinet.

Mr. Mazankowski: A pussycat in cabinet, that is right. The minister could do something, if he had any clout and if he were concerned about the agriculture industry, but he is almost talking the same line as the Minister of Finance.

Fuel prices to the farmer have risen by 41.8 per cent from 1980 to 1981, and 21.6 per cent—

Mr. Evans: How much did they rise to everyone else?

Mr. Mazankowski: Oh, that buffoon over there says that ours would have been more. We provided relief for the farmers.

Mr. Evans: I said: "How much did you provide for everyone else?"

Mr. Mazankowski: We provided relief to the farmers. We provided an energy tax credit to the home owners. During the last two years, fuel prices have increased by 63 per cent.

Mr. Nielsen: Economic Vietnam!

Mr. Mazankowski: The bulk of that is in the form of federal government tax of about 57 cents. If the minister wants to bring some relief to the producers of Canada, he can petition the Minister of Finance to reduce the level of that federal government tax, which is nothing more than a massive rip-off at the expense of the producers.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. de Jong: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I can call it one o'clock.

Some hon. Members: No, no!

Mr. Wilson: No, five minutes!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): There is not unanimous consent. The hon. member for Regina East (Mr. de Jong).

Mr. Simon de Jong (Regina East): I am prepared to speak, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the hon. member who previously spoke, I wish to state that our party supports this bill.

Mr. Huntington: Of course! You are socialists!

Mr. Ittinuar: I am glad you noticed!

Mr. de Jong: It is indeed ironic—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. The hon. member for Regina East has the floor.

Mr. de Jong: Indeed it is ironic, Mr. Speaker, that the members of the Conservative Party, on the one hand, ask for increased government assistance and involvement in the field of agriculture, yet, on the other hand, when things do not work out, they always blame the government. In part, I agree with them when they blame things on this particular government. If anything, what the Liberal Party does is to give government a bad name.

I appreciate some of the concerns of my colleagues in the House. However, it is irresponsible for them to draw the conclusion that there is no role for a public body in the field of agriculture in this country. I think it is very naive for them to suggest that the free enterprise system alone will ensure that sufficient food is on the table of the Canadian consumer at a proper price and that Canadian farmers will be able to get a decent return for their labour and investment. There must be some government involvement.

I do not know of one country in the world, including the United States, which does not have active government involvement in its agricultural sector. Agriculture is simply too important to be placed in the hands of increasingly fewer and larger corporations. Indeed, over the past number of years we have seen this trend toward fewer farms and larger corporations, such as food producers and distributors. It is a trend which we in this party quite honestly view with great alarm. Any country, including our own, puts itself in a bad position if it allows a small group of multinational corporations to form a monopoly over such a necessity as food, so that it can control payments to farmers and the price to consumers.

A cliché, but one which bears repeating, is that this country is a truly gifted nation. We have the gifts and the resources which God has given us, such as vast tracts of land, very fertile fields and a very experienced farming population. Our farmers have a desire to produce good food at reasonable prices. Surely these are things we have going for us. Yet as, I will mention in my continuing remarks—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. It being one o'clock I do now leave the chair until two o'clock p.m.

At one o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): When the House rose at one o'clock, the hon. member for Regina East had the floor.

Mr. de Jong: Mr. Speaker, before the luncheon adjournment I was discussing the role that governments can and should play in the agricultural sector, something my Conservative friends to my right at times have difficulty accepting. Agriculture in this country has always been a mix of public, private and co-operative involvement.