

Government Orders

What we are talking about is not so much whether Bill C-98, the Farm Income Protection Act, will protect production in this country, but whether it will protect family farmers in this country. I have no doubt that we will keep on producing food in this country. Certainly we have the resources to do so and the world will keep on needing food, there is no question about that. So we will produce food in this country.

The question is: Who will produce it? Will it be family farmers as we have known it; generations of farmers who pass on the farming knowledge from one generation to another, the knowledge of a particular piece of land from one generation to another, or will it be corporate farms, a very few large farms where everybody works as hired help with no real commitment to the industry and culture of the farming community, the small communities and towns that rely on the farming community? All of that, which is so much a part of the Canadian fabric, could well be lost.

I would like to say that in some ways I feel, quite personally, that it is many of my friends and peers who are getting wiped out by the agriculture crisis that we are facing right now. The older generation of farmers, our parents, people who started in the 1930s and so on, went through tough times in the late 1950s which were resolved, in many ways, by the Diefenbaker government selling grain to the Soviet Union and China. Those same people went through the low prices and the inability to sell grain in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, distinguished himself by saying: "Why should I sell your grain?" Those farmers went through those years. Those who have survived will continue to survive, but they are getting older.

What happened was that in the 1970s when prices were good there was quite a number of young farmers in all communities across the country who went back to the farm and established their families on the farm and took up farming as a career. These farm families are now in their late 30s, 40s and early 50s and are up against the wall. These people do not know whether they will be able to put a crop in this year. These people do not know whether they will have to relocate their families, whether the way of life that they chose is gone forever or whether it is worthwhile to try and hang on for another year. This is a crisis that not only pertains to individuals,

it pertains to whole communities and, indeed, whole regions of this country. If you look at the figures you can see why.

In 1980, net farm income in this country was about \$4.5 billion to \$5 billion a year. By 1989-90, it had gone down to \$3.2 billion although inflation had about doubled the cost to production in that time. Another 54 per cent drop this year to about \$2 billion nationally. But in Saskatchewan and Manitoba not a dime of net farm income over-all. That means there is nothing to live on for farm families in those two provinces without government assistance in this coming year. Unfortunately these discouraging trends in the farm community have also been reinforced by other actions of the government which have also served to demoralize farm communities and take away their reasons for being—things like post office closures, closures of railways, and now most recently the cuts to revenue sharing with the provinces, which is serving to undermine the health and education systems.

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In a lot of these rural communities it is the small rural hospital, the small rural school that is already in trouble that will be the first to go because of the cuts that were recently announced by the federal government. That again undermines that rural community, not only in terms of morale but by taking away valuable jobs which members of the farm family could hold to supplement their farm income.

The legislation we are talking about here permits the government to proceed with agreements with the provinces on the GRIP and NISA programs is the result of a long process obviously. There is a long history of struggle by farmers to get in place government programs which will maintain their incomes and their way of life—going back to the thirties, struggles for crop insurance, struggles for grain stabilization and so on.

It became apparent that a lot of these were not working properly. Too much *ad hoc* assistance was still needed, and that is why when the former Minister of Agriculture, John Wise, in 1985 committed the government to a long-term permanent program, there was widespread support for that idea across the farm community and across all political parties, a real willingness to move that agenda ahead.