The Land of
MILK & MONEY

INSIDE:

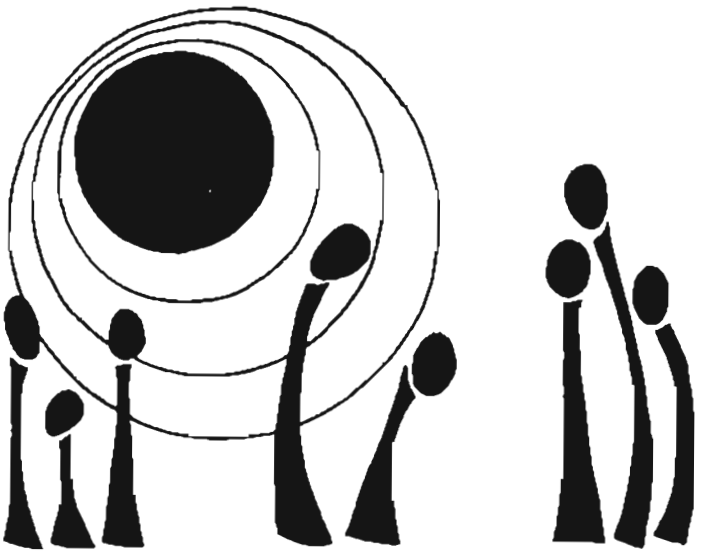
THE REPORT OF THE PEOPLE's FOOD COMMISSION

In the 30 years since the People's Food Commission concluded with the publication of this book, a movement for justice and sustainability in the food system has grown up in Canada, reflecting many of the ideas and issues contained in this report. The policies underlying the concerns of Canadians in the 1970s have, however, not changed a great deal, even as their results – from the destruction of fisheries to the crisis of obesity – have become ever more dire.

The People's Food Policy Project is designed to pick up where the People's Food Commission left off. It is intended to engage Canadians across the country in an examination of the policy framework at every level which supports the current system, and a process to develop a policy for Canada based in the concepts of food sovereignty.

For more information about the People's Food Policy Project, see
www.foodsecurecanada.org
or send an email to the Coordinating Committee care of
eric(at)interpares.ca, moe(at)justfood.ca, or cathleen(at)ramshorn.ca

The Land of Milk and Money



The National Report of the People's Food Commission

The Land of Milk and Money

The National Report
of the
People's Food
Commission

between the lines

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How to Read This Book

The main text is set in Melior Roman, with a ragged right-hand column. Quotes within the text are set off:

> So that this is what a quote within the text looks like.

There are two kinds of inset boxes scattered throughout the book. Commentary and analysis written by members of the People's Food Commission are set in Melior and look like this:

COMMENTARY FROM COMMISSIONERS
Usually these boxes bear some relation to the text in the area in which they are placed. They extend the argument in the main part of the text.

The other sort of boxes are set in Helvetica and are usually testimony from the hearings rendered verbatim. They look like this:

PRESENTATIONS TO THE HEARINGS
These are descriptions of people's own experience and opinions about the food system in Canada. Within both these kinds of boxes there is a further arrangement to indicate quotes, thus:

> These are generally used when someone else is quoted within a presentation.

They occur infrequently.

Boxes are set off by lines above and below. It is not necessary to read them exactly where they occur; they serve to clarify and illuminate the main text.

Introduction

THREE years have passed since the beginning of the People's Food Commission. In that time hundreds of people have been involved in travelling, organizing hearings, meeting, planning, recording, transcribing, arranging refreshments, contacting newspapers, all the tasks required to hold a series of hearings across the country. Over five thousand people were involved in some way or another. This report is based on the information, stories and opinions of all these people.

In a certain way, the publication of the report marks the end of the People's Food Commission as an organization. But the process of creating a workable, sustainable food system for Canada began long before the Commission came into being and will continue long after it ceases to play an official role. *The Land of Milk and Money* is just a marking stone along the route.

The basic purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the system that brings us our food and influences the shape of our lives. The report should also help to link together people who experience the food system in different ways, from farmers to fishermen, from people who work in food plants to shoppers who are trying to balance their weekly budgets against their grocery lists. We hope that in this way people will gain a better understanding of the experiences, problems and insights of others who are dealing with the food system from different vantage points.

Our role is not to give technical explanations of all the issues involved. In fact, we may sometimes have simplified technical complexities. We have not attempted to produce a complete, fully researched description of the food system, academically correct in every detail. Rather, we began with the assumption that everyday experience is a valuable source of information, and that people's stories of how things work and fit together have an important validity. This is a report of what people across Canada are saying about the food system, how it works, what their concerns are, as much as it is about the food system itself. We try to outline how the various issues and concerns fit together, based on the submissions and information that the Commission received.

The report should also help us to understand the Canadian food system politically: who made it the way it is; who and what holds it together now; who benefits; who suffers; who could change it; what would have to be done to change it. We mean this book to be an aid for action, for organizing. And we invite you to come with us through the chapters that follow to see if our description and analysis of people's experience in the food system make sense to you.

Why a People's Food Commission?

It was no accident that the People's Food Commission was organized in 1977. By that year, Canada's food system was showing signs of severe strain.

The world economy saw drastic changes in 1973-74. Just when the United States was suffering from its losing war in Vietnam, the OPEC nations quadrupled the price of oil and in effect began to break the economic domination of the world by the industrialized nations. Inflation and unemployment jumped together. While unemployment stayed at over seven per cent during the 1970s, house prices climbed past the reach of three-quarters of Canadian families, and in the last four years food prices have

At the hearings audiences listened to a broad range of submissions, from farmers and waitresses and processing plant workers, from written briefs to songs and slide shows.

increased by over fifty per cent. The economic crisis has not yet turned into a political crisis (as it did during the 1930s) but it has brought suffering to many Canadians, especially those on low and fixed incomes.

In the post-war years especially, there has been steady pressure on our farm population; eighty per cent of farmers have left their land since 1945. But the pressure has increased sharply in the past five years, and it is no exaggeration to speak of a crisis in agriculture. Those who work in food-related industries are under increasing tension as the crisis works its way through the food system.

These are the concerns that gave rise to the People's Food Commission: how are Canadians to face these deteriorating economic conditions? How can anyone sift through the very confusing symptoms of an ailing economy, to find the fundamental causes? Where can people turn for answers?

In retrospect it all seems so obvious. Who can tell us more about the food system than the people affected by the changes? In 1977 the Berger Commission was in full swing in the MacKenzie Valley, showing how a similar kind of investigation could be effectively carried out. Of course no one person can provide an account of the whole food system. But individual perceptions, pieced together, can give a clear picture of the whole puzzle.

In the beginning (Spring, 1977) a few individuals and groups decided to go ahead and consult as many people as possible from different sectors of the food system. We called it the People's Food Commission because this was not going to be a government affair. We were going to hear directly from people and go back to them with our results.

Our resources were limited. At first we had no money, no organizational apparatus, and little previous experience to draw from for such a venture. It was an optimistic and risky experiment and we couldn't do it by ourselves. The first step was to check out whether the idea had support. Within one year, more than 125 organizations — big and small, from different sectors of the economy — signed their names to the project. A germ of an idea became an organizational reality.

The supporting organizations provided enough money to hire one or two staff people and one or two commissioners in each region (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Northern Ontario, Southern Ontario, the Atlantic; Quebec created a

THE PEOPLE'S FOOD COMMISSION

The following organizations support the People's Food Commission and the process it represents. Since the People's Food Commission is an independent Commission of inquiry, its report and recommendations will not necessarily reflect the views of any of the endorsing organizations.

National

Canadian Council for International Co-operation
Canadian Friends Service Committee
Canadian Labour Congress
Canadian University Service Overseas
Committee for Justice and Liberty Foundation
Consumers' Association of Canada
Division of World Outreach, United Church of Canada
Frontier College
GATT-fly
National Farmers Union
National Union of Students
OXFAM-Canada
Student Christian Movement
YWCA of Canada
Canadian Catholic Organization for Development & Peace (Anglophone sector)
Division of Mission in Canada, United Church of Canada
Canadian Food and Allied Workers
National Indian Brotherhood
Inter Pares
The Catholic Women's League of Canada
Service Employees Union, Local 204
Retail Clerks Council of Canada

British Columbia

B.C. Federation of Labour
Canada World Youth
Canadian University Service Overseas
Collective Resource and Services Co-operative
East End Storefront Co-operative
Farmland Defence League
Fed-Up Co-operative
International Development Education Resource Association
Nanaimo International Development Association
Social Responsibility Committee, Unitarian Church, Vancouver
Southern Africa Action Coalition
United Fishermen and Allied Workers of B.C.
United Nations Association
Canadian Scientific Pollution & Environmental Control Society (SPEC)
Co-operative Services Office, B.C. Central Credit Union
B.C. Conference of the United Church of Canada
CCEC Credit Union
Prince Rupert, Terrace & Districts Labour Council
Vancouver & District Labour Council
B.C. Central Credit Union
Women United for a Non-Exploitive New Age (WUNENA)

Alberta

Alberta Human Rights and Civil Liberties Ass'n.
Christian Farmers Federation
Development and Peace (CCODP) Edmonton Cttee.
Division of Church and Society, St. Paul's Presbytery (UC)
Edmonton Cross-Cultural Learner Centre
Edmonton and District Labour Council
Peace River Presbytery, United Church of Canada
Free South Africa Committee of Alberta
Interchurch International Development Education Ass'n.
New World Reflections
Save Tomorrow and Oppose Pollution (STOP)
Second Prairie Food Co-op Conference (Edmonton)
University of Alberta Chaplains
YWCA Edmonton
Edmonton Presbytery of the United Church of Canada
Alberta Federation of Labour
Stuffed or Starved, Calgary
Regions 7 and 8, National Farmers Union
OXFAM-Canada, Edmonton Local Committee
Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 41
Calgary & District Labour Council

Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan Conference of the United Church of Canada
Saskatchewan Federation of Labour
One Sky Cross-Cultural Centre
Briarpatch Magazine
Community Health Clinic, Saskatoon
Magpie Symbiotic Co-operative
District 2, Local 620, National Farmers Union
Retail, Wholesale & Department Store Union (Sask.)

Manitoba

Agassiz Food Co-operative
Associated Tenants' Action Committee Inc. (Winnipeg)
International Development Education Association
Manitoba Council for International Co-operation
PLURA

Ontario

Centretown Community Resource Centre
Cross-Cultural Learner Centre, London
Development Education Centre
Global Community Centre, Kitchener
Kitchener City Council
Latin American Working Group
Law Union of Ontario
YWCA Metro Toronto
Miles for Millions, Toronto
Ontario Federation of Labour
Ontario Federation of Students
Ontario Public Interest Research Group
Ottawa Community Credit Union
Ottawa-Hull Learner Centre
Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society
Scarborough Foreign Mission Society
SHAIR of Hamilton
YWCA Sudbury
Toronto Federation of Food Co-operatives
DWO Committee, Toronto Conference of the United Church
London and District Labour Council
Students' General Association, Laurentian University
Windsor and District Labour Council
Chaplains at McMaster University, Hamilton
Pollution Probe, Ottawa
Metropolitan Toronto & District Labour Council
Oxford County Federation of Agriculture
Bancroft & District Food Co-op

London Conference of the United Church of Canada
Hamilton and District Labour Council
Toronto Library Workers, Local 1996, CUPE
Sudbury & District Labour Council
Pollution Probe, Toronto
Real Food Co-op
Leads Co. Co-op
North Bay & District Labour Council

Quebec
Co-operative de Ressources Educatives/Educational Resource Co-operative

New Brunswick
Centre de Promotion Rurale
New Brunswick Federation of Labour
Comptoir alimentaire de St. Leonard
CRANO (Centre Régional d'Amenagement de Nord-Ouest)
Comité des consommateurs de Madawaska
Centre Régional d'Amenagement du Nord
Centre Régional d'Amenagement du Sud

Nova Scotia
Alma-Greenhill Branch of the Women's Institute of Nova Scotia
Sheep Producers Association of Nova Scotia
Halifax-Dartmouth Ten Days for World Development
Nova Scotia Community Planning Association

Prince Edward Island
Catholic Social Action Commission of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Charlottetown
P.E.I. Committee of Ten Days for World Development

separate organization). The commissioners were chosen after things had been going for a year. Their role has been somewhat more public than other roles: chairing the hearings, conducting interviews, speaking to the media and, finally, overseeing the writing of this report. Three commissioners, Anne Bishop, Patrick Kerans and Lucien Royer, were assigned the task of drafting the report and another commissioner, Catherine Morisset, was responsible for a French text. Each region chose its own commissioners; but the criteria were roughly the same everywhere. People were chosen who were deeply involved either in food issues or in political or community organizing.

Catherine Morisset, Ontario Regional commissioner, interviewed for cable television, Ottawa.

While the role of the commissioners was somewhat more public, volunteers, members of Regional and Local Working Groups, carried on the bulk of the work. Local groups sponsored hearings in each centre; the regional groups carried out co-ordination and planning. People all over donated food, accommodation, printing, artwork, recording facilities, space for hearings, and sometimes travel, along with hours of their time.

As an organization, the Commission was itself an experiment. Since so much work was done by volunteers, decisions — at every level — were made by consensus. The whole project was co-ordinated by representatives from each region who met in Ottawa twice a year. It is an enormous tribute to everyone involved that the Commission remained an effectively organized (though vastly disparate) group which accomplished a huge task.

Hearings got underway in the fall of 1978, and were finished by May, 1979. During that time the commissioners met with people from Victoria, B.C., to Nain, Labrador; in major cities such as Toronto or Vancouver and in smaller places, such as Edmunston, N.B., or Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan. There were formal public hearings, community meetings organized around specific issues, interviews, kitchen meetings and guided tours.

We heard from many different kinds of people, with different problems. Farmers and fishermen told of rising costs and sluggish prices, of the pressure to leave their boats and farms, of the lack of jobs for them when they did go out of business. People from the Third World, from our inner cities, from our

north told us what it is like to have too little food or bad food. Processing-plant workers told us of inhuman working conditions, of poor pay, of difficulties in organizing. We heard from people made ill by chemical additives in food; from people concerned that agricultural land would be depleted because of reliance on chemicals. We heard about the loss of agricultural land to other, urban uses.

In many ways — written briefs, talks, discussions, slide shows — people recounted their own experiences with Canada's food system. When members of the Commission travelled from place to place, they were billeted in private homes, so they got an intimate glimpse of people's lives. What people revealed in those less public moments was as important as what they told the Commission at the meetings.

Many compared us to a Royal Commission, but that was far from the truth. Very little of our funding (all told, less than ten per cent) came from government. We had no specified terms of reference; we knew something was wrong, but we didn't know exactly what. At first we didn't have specific questions. Instead, we decided to trust people's judgment and let them tell us in their own words what they thought was important about the food system.

Because our questions were unclear when we started out, everything we heard seemed chaotic and unrelated. At one hearing a farmer came to talk about the price of fertilizer, followed by an urban dweller who complained about headaches caused by additives. We kept talking to each other, comparing what we heard. Slowly common threads emerged.

After the hearings were over, people in each region spent weeks listening to the tapes, summarizing and cataloguing. Four of us then took all the summaries, all 960 briefs, all the tapes (a very large box-full) and spent four weeks going through them — drawing diagrams, starting files, trying to get a picture. Each time we thought we had it all, we'd find another brief telling us something that wouldn't fit our scheme.

The first chapter of the report reflects this sifting process. It is an attempt to stitch together a picture of the Canadian food system as experienced by several thousand Canadians. In that chapter we make no attempt to analyse or argue. We are simply trying to listen and reflect the stories as carefully and as completely as we can.

As the hearings proceeded we began to see trends in people's experiences, and parallels between different sectors of the food economy. We also began to recognize how the Canadian food system is part of an international picture. Chapter Two reflects this stage of our process. We decided that the quickest, best way to illustrate the trends was to introduce case studies that show what is happening throughout the system.

When the time came to plan this book, we reviewed everything we had heard and in a meeting with all the commissioners and staff, unravelled a "common thread" which ran through all the evidence. This thread was our attempt to get at the root causes of the trends described in Chapter Two. Chapter Three is the result.

People did more than talk about their concerns.

THE COMMISSIONERS

British Columbia:

Mary Rawson, Vancouver; a land economist, town and regional planner; presently in private practice.

Jack Warnock, Naramata; orchardist, writer and environmental activist.

Alberta:

Lucien Royer, Edmonton; active in organizations working on environment, energy and occupational health issues.

Saskatchewan:

Bill Marjerrison, Elrose; grain farmer; for twenty years or more an elected person in rural municipal government and the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool.

Manitoba:

Harold Proven, Basswood; after fourteen years as a tradesman in construction, returned to farming; active in the National Farmers Union since 1970, has held various elected positions.

Muriel Smith, Winnipeg; a high-school counsellor and activist for women's rights; active in the Manitoba NDP, where she has served as President and was candidate for Leader.

Paul Phillips, Oakbank; professor of economics, University of Manitoba; author of books on labour and regional disparities; chairman for the past five and a half years of Manitoba Milk Control Board, member of Manitoba Dairy Board, former member and research director of Manitoba Development Advisory Board.

Ontario:

Anne Bishop; Toronto; adult education worker; since the hearings, has returned to being a farm worker in Nova Scotia.

Catherine Morisset, Ottawa; owned a small food business when the Commission began; now a community education organizer concerned with local and international issues; has been involved with food co-ops and food production.

Jim Sheldon, Highgate; corn farmer; has been active with farmers organizing for political action, including the National Farmers Union.

Atlantic:

Marion Kerans, Halifax; community worker; active in public participation processes for urban planning.

Pat Kerans, Halifax; teacher, writer, active in community groups involved in housing and urban land issues.

They proposed many different solutions. These proposed solutions were confusing because, while the stories fit together very well the solutions seemed quite contradictory.

We had to wrestle with this problem. Since the original plan of the Commission was to consult people, it seemed that the only appropriate way to report was simply to mirror what people said. However, if there were contradictions in what people recommended — and especially if there were contradictions between people's stories and their recommendations — then we wouldn't really be helping one group learn from another if we did nothing to figure out the contradictions.

Our reflections on how to handle this were strongly influenced by our experience in the Commission. We had no "experts" or explicit leaders to decide the course of things when we ran into disagreements and difficulties. We had a number of people among us who were willing and able to mediate. We had a number of people, as well, who were very thoughtful about the way outside pressures and values influence the inner workings of a group. Even though everyone in the Commission wanted to work together with complete respect as equals, we all carried years of conditioning, false assumptions based on sex, age, occupation, class and education. Understanding one another's experience always helped bring people together. It seemed that in the report the Commission should also try to exercise the same kind of mediatory leadership.

Chapter Four is the result of our reflections on the contradictions that came up in people's suggested solutions, and between their experience and their proposals. Our own struggles to keep working together, despite differences, taught us much about why people differed in this way.

Finally, in Chapter Five, we review proposals made to the Commission, taking Chapters Three and Four as our guide. We are sure that the only real solution to present difficulties will come through more effective organization among people. We try to outline some of the pitfalls to avoid, and suggest actions that might lead to constructive change.

Welcome to the People's Food Commission.

Some submissions were in the form of dramatic presentations. These photos are from a skit by the Kam Lab Theatre Company at the Thunder Bay hearing.

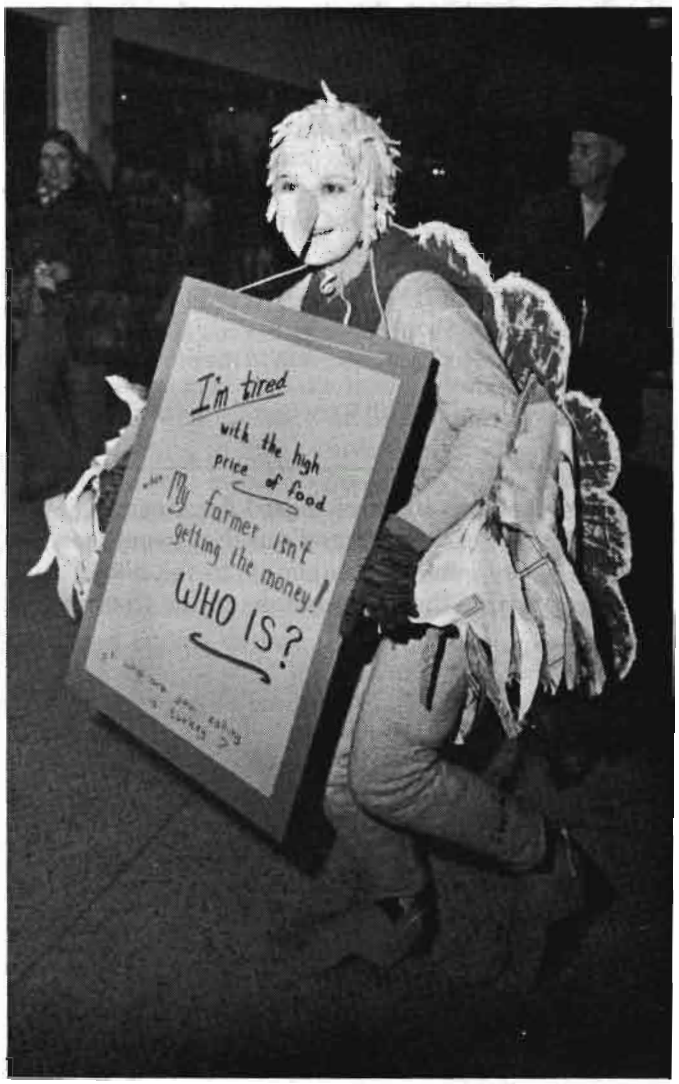
1 Food for Thought: The Hearings

DURING the time it held hearings, interviews and meetings, the People's Food Commission heard first-hand about the experiences of around five thousand people: their difficulties, their sufferings, their dreams, their suggestions, their actions. The commissioners were deeply impressed with the thoughtfulness, seriousness and sincere concern of these people. Some of them were upset over the soaring price or deteriorating quality of food. Others told stories going back in time for years, stories of struggles, of ground lost and gained. There were farmers who had banded together to save victories they thought they had won earlier, in the twenties and thirties; waitresses who had risked getting fired to organize themselves; people who had successfully started co-ops; "volunteers" who had returned from working in the Third World, and who were now trying to get Canadians to learn from the experience of other peoples.

The stories of all these people knit together to form a coherent picture of the food system in Canada and, to some extent, worldwide. Imagine the conversation as they tell each other about their experiences. The account wanders a bit; you can't expect a variety of people, all with different concerns and personalities, to squeeze their knowledge into one straight line.

The Price of Food

Most people start with the high price of food. But are Canadian prices really too high? The prices in this country are lower than in many others; yet many Canadians go hungry. Where does the money Canadians pay for food go? This question keeps coming back to the Commission. It is the continuing thread in the story. People follow various leads, trying to find an answer. It is quickly obvious that the money certainly does not go to the primary producers, the farmers and people of the fishing



Before the Kitchener-Waterloo hearings, working group members went to the shopping malls to criticize rapid fluctuations in turkey prices. Shown here is Kae Elgie.

villages, who are caught in a perpetual price-cost squeeze, forced to produce more each year in an attempt to make ends meet. To produce more, they must put to use more and more machinery, energy and, perhaps worst, chemicals that endanger the health of both producers and consumers and work to destroy the soil. Does the government protect people adequately from these various chemicals? Do doctors make it their business to know about them? We think of the consumer as king or queen, yet many people told the Commission that as consumers they have few real choices: many food additives are addictive; people are bombarded with advertising; a few large chains blanket the cities with stores, leaving people nowhere else to shop.

The inquiry found that there is a whole lot more to the food issue than simply prices. As the United Food and Allied Workers said in a submission in Toronto, "Quality is an increasingly important concern and ultimately supply is the single most critical food question." But the UFAW submission went on to say also that government surveys have consistently shown that prices are still what Canadians think of first when it comes to food.

FOOD PRICES RISE

At the end of July, 1979, Statistics Canada announced that food prices had risen by 3.2 per cent in the previous month. That meant a yearly rate of 12.2 per cent in food price increases, compared with 8.9 per cent for the overall cost of living.

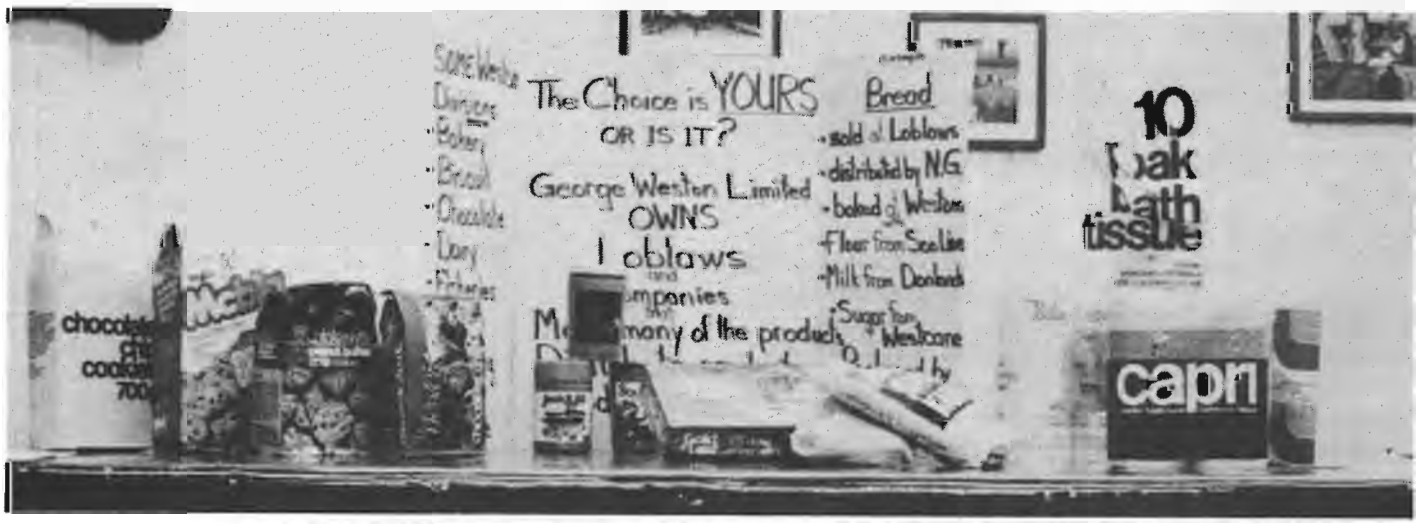
In fact, an Anti-Inflation Board document tabled at the Ottawa hearing pointed out that twenty-five per cent of the public's complaints to the board had been over food. Other submissions to the Commission reflected similar priorities. "I think we're being taken for a ride," a senior citizen, talking about prices, told the inquiry in Edmonton. Or, as a report to the Commission from the Calgary Labour Council put it, "Increased productivity should mean lower unit costs of food. Have you noticed any lower food prices? I haven't."

Many people denied that the price rises have hurt Canadians. "In Canada we spend only sixteen per cent [of our disposable income] on food and therefore can have a colour TV, a second car, a better house, a nicer vacation. And those things Canadians want to have — and should have. We can have those things because of, and not in spite of, cheap food." (Allen Watson, Dawson Creek, B.C.)

There were also some submissions which noted that Canadians seem much more sensitive about food prices than about other rising prices: "People notice the increase in the price of lettuce more so than the price increase in a new car." (John Ramage, grocer, London, Ont.)

This kind of feeling sometimes comes with a hint of blame, a suggestion that people don't mind paying for luxuries, but resent paying for food: "When the price of fresh potatoes goes up, there is always a hue and cry. Talking about it to an owner of a grocery store in Woodstock, he told me that the same people who complained bitterly about paying nine cents a pound for fresh potatoes never batted an eye on picking up ten-cent bags of potato chips for the children. At this price, they were paying nine dollars a pound for their potatoes." (Ruth Skillings, farmer, London, Ont.)

It is important to understand the perspective of farmers when they speak of cheap food, since they have been squeezed dry by what they call the



Monopoly control blankets the industry. A display at the Thunder Bay hearing.

government's "cheap food policy". As the Canadian Agriculture Movement in Calgary put it, "If there is no cheap energy policy, no cheap labour policy, no cheap manufacturing policy, how can there be a cheap food policy?" Joe Crowley, a beef farmer living near Peterborough, Ont., made a similar comment: "I consider it a popular misconception in the late 1970s that food, beef in particular, is expensive. If expensive — in relation to what? Certainly not to my costs. . . . Fertilizer is up $20 a ton. . . . Taxes have doubled in the past ten years with no improvements. . . . Beef farming is like horse racing, making a profit with similar odds, but waiting a longer time. It's a long shot."

WHAT IS THE CHEAP FOOD POLICY?

Everyone wants "cheap food". No one wants to pay more for food. Why do farmers insist that they are victims of a federal and provincial "cheap food policy"?

The costs of producing food in Canada are higher than in most other countries. Land costs are higher. Labour costs are higher. The farm-supply industry is heavily monopolized, and farm capital costs are higher. The climate is colder, which means there are shorter growing seasons and greater feed requirements for farm animals.

Yet the average Canadian spends less of his/her take-home pay on food than do people in any country of the world outside the United States. How is this possible?

Canada has the lowest tariffs on imported food of any country in the industrial world. Very few foods are subject to import quotas. This has made Canada a net importer of all foods except cereal grains.

When low-cost foods are imported into Canada by brokers, food processors, wholesalers and retailers, this drives down the price of local produce.

This is what causes the "cheap food" situation; it is government policy.

The "cheap food policy" is, in fact, a trade-off. Processors and farmers cannot cover their costs and are driven out. Meanwhile, corporations can pay their urban workers less and still be able to offer them "the good life".

— Jack Warnock, B.C. orchardist and author, *Profit Hungry*.

There will be more later in this chapter about the squeeze on farming and fishing people. For now, the point is that food in Canada is not expensive relative to average income and also relative to other countries:

> Canada's food inflation is high — but this must be put into proper perspective. When compared to those of similar industrialized nations, Canada's inflation rate at 185 per cent of 1970 levels is only slightly ahead of the United States with 169 per cent. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Japan, France and Sweden, all have higher rates of food inflation.
>
> If we take into account the fact that the rise in average net disposable income has kept pace with the rise in food prices, and recognize that the per cent of income spent on food is low — second only to that of the United States — our Canadian consumer is not as badly treated as he thinks. (Anti-Inflation Board presentation to the Grocery Product Manufacturers of Canada; tabled, Ottawa, Ont.)

However, there are Canadians who suffer from the rising price of food. The average income is not a very telling statistic. The Canadian food system might work well in the abstract and on the average, but it is important to see that at the same time many people are not being well served. "There is a substantial difference in the well-being of a low income mother of five and, say, a corporate executive. . . . Wealthy families might spend under one per cent of their income on food while those at the poverty level might spend up to sixty per cent of their incomes on food." (Bill Oxendale, Calgary, Alta.)

There was testimony from every part of the country, the rich regions as well as the poor, indicating that those people dependent on welfare or Old Age Security simply do not have enough money to feed themselves and their families adequately. Rev. Cal Pretty of Halifax, N.S., tries in his work to provide emergency food supplies for people in his community who need help, and he told the Commission that the number of persons on welfare who are coming to him is noticeably increasing. "I see three to four hundred people a year in my office who have run out of money three or four days before their welfare cheques come. . . . Of the thirty-three who came over the Easter weekend, I was only able to help seven of them. It's pretty darn hard inside to turn these people away."

A low-income mother in Edmonton told the other side of the story. "I found myself sacrificing basically the foods you needed the most. The most nutritious food you can't squeeze into your budget." This point of view was confirmed by other submissions. For instance: "A family on social assistance is given enough food money to allow it to eat adequately for only twenty-four days of the month." (Sister Irene Burge, Charlottetown, P.E.I.)

Other Canadians go hungry simply because they are old. Some senior citizens — those who live in their own houses or in subsidized senior citizen accommodations, for instance — manage an adequate diet because they do not have to pay market rates for their housing. But for many it is the same as for any poor person: housing must come first and you can spend only what's left on food.

To people on fixed incomes, such as pensioners, the food system is anything but fair. Above, senior citizens present a brief at the London, Ontario, hearing.

THE END OF THE MONTH BLUES

All people on a fixed income suffer the end-of-the-month blues to some degree. The symptoms of this malady are no money, empty cupboard, hunger pangs of the stomach, and depression. At the end of the month we run out of money and have to scrounge around begging at the Salvation Army, the church doors.... Anything edible is devoured at this time. Usually it is macaroni with oil or margarine, mayonnaise and ketchup sandwiches. Whatever is available is eaten. There's never enough to put by for a freezer so that food costs would be cut. We don't have cars to make the rounds of stores to get the weekly specials.... Even if the poor had the information and education, we do not have the incomes to eat well. We don't have a choice.

More often than not our children are sent to school hungry and ill clad or kept at home hungry and at least warm....

This morning, I kept my youngest son home from school because he had no street car ticket to get there and I couldn't bear the thought of him walking all the way to school and home again on an empty stomach.

I feel that it is unfair that low-income students trying to get out of the poverty trap, as my sons are trying to do desperately, must bear the burden of walking to school ill-fed and ill-shod in the winter time.

— Gillian Swindell and Marie Sword, Mother-Led Union, Toronto, Ont.

Canada's native population is another group that often goes hungry or malnourished — something that seems especially ironic, because it is also a fact that they knew how to live in good health before the white people brought them "progress". According to Dr. Ales Hrdlicka, who was quoted in a brief presented by the National Indian Brotherhood, "Whole important scourges were totally unknown," to the native people before the Europeans came. Skeletal remains of Indians dating from precolumbian times show that, barring few exceptions, they were remarkably free from disease.

Yet what has happened since? In more recent times, "Indian people have been gradually forced to depend more and more heavily on store food. Many Indian children have had so little experience with natural, healthy, traditional Indian food that they have acquired a taste for more expensive, less nutritious food available in stores — even high-priced junk food." (Walt Taylor, Penticton, B.C.)

Prices are also a problem for Canadians living in more isolated areas. From Northern submissions and a visit to Labrador, the Commission found that when the people can still live off the land and eat "country food", they do well. To the extent that they become dependent upon "store food", they do badly, paying

enormous transportation costs and — at least in Labrador — constantly getting spoiled food. One commissioner saw potatoes in a government store in Labrador which were so rotten that the burlap bag had begun to decay. The potatoes cost fifty cents a pound. The public health nurse told us that she had treated someone who had become violently ill after eating spaghetti from a tin three years old.

BEFORE THE WHITE PEOPLE CAME

In the days that are often said to be past, the peoples of this hemisphere nourished their bodies from the land and waters around them. Each of the indigenous nations occupied a territory which yielded a diet to which they had adapted. Indians of the coasts led rich lives on the bounty of the seas and the lands that bordered them. On the plains the buffalo in huge roving herds were the food base of Indians of these regions.

The woodlands yielded numerous animals, fishes and types of vegetation for the consumption of its habitants. Iroquoian peoples practised agricultural arts to grow foods which complemented the wild foods that nature provided. In the barren rocky ground of the Arctic tundra, Inuit ate the caribou which ate the lichens which consumed the very rocks on which the Inuit lived.

All obtained from their environment the ideal foods to support life in that particular environment. Living in harmony with their surroundings, they took only what was needed and eventually returned everything back to the earth from which it had come.

— Cliff Gazee, submitted by Carol Farkas in Toronto, Ont.

About the year 1800, the height of the average European male was roughly 5'2" tall, while the agricultural Iroquoian male of that same period averaged in excess of 6'. In Europe throughout the long "Dark Ages" period, whole populations were decimated by the ravages of diverse plagues and diseases while in the pre-colonial Americas infectious and chronic disease was virtually non-existent. Out of well over thirty thousand catalogued diseases, only eighty-seven were known to exist and then very rarely among the Indian people of this continent.

— National Indian Brotherhood.

The native people lost their land. Land clearing, hunting, highways, development and pollution have destroyed the livelihood of the people. . . . They are forced to buy their food in stores with only the money they have from welfare, and only the information they have from radio and television advertising. They buy high carbohydrate, high sugar, cheap foods. The loss of livelihood, useful work, community structure along with the cravings brought about by malnutrition cause the people to turn to alcohol.

— From audience, Sudbury hearing.

Many of the health problems, both mental and physical, suffered by native people are related to the shift from a high quality, high protein diet to a high carbohydrate, low protein diet.

— Carol Farkas, nutritionist, Toronto, Ont.

It's not a problem of nutrition education, but a problem of land.

— From audience, Sudbury hearing.

NORTHERN FOOD . . .

Frobisher Bay is the largest community of Baffin Island and residents feel they are being discriminated against by way of food prices. The cost of seven items is 201 per cent more than in Ottawa. The people must absorb transportation costs amounting to forty-one cents a pound and frequently the product purchased is inferior.

— Margaret Coutts, Winnipeg, Man.

. . . AND NORTHERN BEER

The fundamental problem of food costs in the North, namely in the Arctic region, is the unavailability of adequate food supplies within the region. This factor forces the consumer to purchase food items from the south, i.e. south of 60° which results in high freight costs for many of the isolated, small settlements. Transportation depends on air service year-round and on barge delivery during the short ice-free period in summer for many settlements. High long-term storage costs raise the price of sea-lift goods.

In the case of Cambridge Bay, a village of 800 people comprised chiefly of Inuit, all food items other than land foods which consist primarily of caribou and fish are transported from the south. Most staple and non-perishable items arrive on the barge during the short summer months, providing ice conditions allow travel. All fresh and frozen goods arrive via air carrier, which is usually Pacific Western Airlines as their service originates from Edmonton where the food wholesalers and many retailers offering northern service are located. In addition, PWA offers the cheapest freight rate. *The Bay* is the only retail outlet in the village that provides food. Some non-native families place their own orders with southern and/or Yellowknife retailers.

Regardless of where the Cambridge Bay family purchases its food, the cost of food is high because of the freight rates involved. At the present time (March, 1979) the PWA air rate is 42 cents per pound for freight under 100 pounds or a minimum charge of $13.00. The rate for orders of 100 pounds or more is 37.7 cents per pound. These rates apply to the Edmonton-Cambridge Bay flight.

In light of the fact that beer, which is a non-essential food item, is sold in various northern settlements on a subsidized basis so as to make a case of beer in Cambridge Bay the same price as a case of beer in Yellowknife, the question arises, "Why isn't provision made to subsidize nutritious food, which is a necessary item?" In its investigation of food prices in Northern Canada which was published in December, 1975, the Food Prices Review Board made the following statement.

> The Board recommends that the costs of transporting a selection of these foods [i.e. fresh produce, dairy products, fresh and frozen meats] to the North should be subsidized by the Federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, possibly out of the royalty fees obtained from resource development in the North. . . . the Board recommends that the subsidy should apply to oranges, apples, cabbage, potatoes, eggs, powdered skim milk and fresh or frozen beef. (p. 33)

To date there is no subsidy on nutritious foods that is passed on to all northern consumers. Northern allowances offered by the federal and territorial governments to their employees, housing subsidy programs and scaled social assistance serve some purpose in compensating for the high cost of living in the north but they do not apply to all residents, nor do they always reflect a subsidy on food costs as there are many other factors to be considered in the cost of northern living. Everything costs more in the Arctic's isolated settlements.

— Wynn Moodie, Cambridge Bay, N.W.T.

Farmers Get the Squeeze

The submissions made clear that food prices are going up and that many Canadians are suffering from the rise. Where is the money going? Who gets it and who benefits from it? Some people think it's the farmers. Like Bill Kersey of Victoria, they point their fingers at marketing boards that keep prices up for farmers. The Consumers' Association of Canada has been consistently critical of marketing boards, calling for at least a constant monitoring of their operations. Its spokesperson in Vancouver said, "CAC believes that consumers should pay the full, long-run costs of the food they eat. The determination of long-run costs will be reflected by a freely determined market price."

This criticism of marketing boards has irked many farmers' groups. An editorial in *Agriweek*, tabled at the Kamloops hearing by the Southern Interior Cattlewomen, said the people of the CAC "are the real enemies of Canadian agriculture; not the weather, or international markets or even the government. These people don't want merely to bite the hand that feeds them; they want to hack it off at the elbow."

It is easy to sympathize with the farmers on this question. A look at the figures for farm incomes shows that farmers in Canada are not getting wealthy from rising food prices. As a result of economic difficulty, many farmers are selling out: "The 1971 census included as a census farm any agricultural holding with sales of $50 or over. On this basis the total number of all 'agricultural holdings' in Canada declined from 366,128 in 1971 to 338,578 in 1976, or by 27,550. . . . The public generally is aware that a rapid rate of farm depopulation has occurred over the past quarter century. This, in turn, has been accompanied by larger farm size, greater centralization of services and the decline of many rural communities."(National Farmers Union, Regina, Sask.)

In a brief tabled in Toronto by Development

ALBERTA'S PIONEERS

I visit about eighty senior citizens as a volunteer. Most people do not have stoves, fridges and therefore they cannot store food. . . . They buy their food day-to-day and they can't store meat. . . . They do not have a balanced diet because most of the people in the area have no other income [than Old Age Security]. Most of them live alone in cubicles for which they pay exorbitant prices for rent. These people get depressed, they get lonely, they commit suicide. . . . They just can't cope with it. Some of the people who I visit are home-bound and need help for shopping.

— Testimony given by a volunteer at an Edmonton inner-city hearing.

During an afternoon the Commission went to speak to some of these senior citizens. To our surprise, most of them had at one time or another been farmers who had to sell their land. Thus the irony that those who spent so much of their lives producing food for others go hungry in their old age.

Steady pressure on farm land has driven farmers out — 80% have left their land since 1945.

Education in Action, an organization working on issues related to aging, Doris Marshall told how it was a "real shocker" when she made a long-overdue visit to her childhood home, a three-quarter-section farm in south-west Manitoba. All through the 1930s, she said, the farm had produced good crops, "due to my father's knowledge and care in his farming". She described what she saw on her return:

> Cattle everywhere, a natural spring from which neighbours had taken clear cold water all through the dry years, fouled by cow dung; fruit and shade trees uprooted or spoiled by herbicides, grain grown for the cattle only — what a travesty! And all because we, like so many other good farmers, were forced off the land by a system which safeguarded the rights of the mortgage companies and the banks to foreclose. Our farm was paid for over and over again in interest on the mortgage. The productivity of the well-farmed land should have been recompensed. But no, the mortgage company, the tool of a system which made its demands, had to be paid. In our case it was paid, at long last. But by that time the dreams, the incentive, the health, the will to continue were gone. The farm was sold. Our family no longer had land.

Doris points to the high cost of interest as the reason her family had to leave the farm. Many others pointed in the same direction — increased costs. "Rising prices in the petroleum, fertilizer, farm machine, construction material, utilities and automation industry are each reflected in rising costs of production for the farmer and rancher." (Canadian

NEWFOUNDLANDERS GET JOBBED

In the food system, Newfoundland is indeed a place apart. There were no hearings there, but we did manage to speak with Mary Mackey, a nutritionist who has worked throughout the province, and Jill Whittaker, who has done research with the Consumers' Association there. Here are some gleanings:

Q: Do Newfoundlanders complain about food quality and prices?
A: In the outports the merchant is the most powerful person in town. He acts as banker as well. If you spoke out, you would have your credit cut off.
Q: Is the food worse in the North, in the outports?
A: Out-of-date stocks, stocks from bankruptcy sales, bloated packages, food going bad — all this is sent on the last boat before winter closes in. There's nothing people can do then. Often on the boats, frozen food, such as meat, will thaw and then get frozen again.
Q: Is it better in the cities?
A: Not always. There seems to be a lot of ignorance about food handling among retailers. For instance, many stores turn off their refrigerators overnight or over the weekend to save on electricity. Manpower offered to put on a course on food handling, but nobody wanted to take it. . . .
Q: Is the CAC (Consumers' Association of Canada) active?
A: No. There are a thousand members, but only one showed up for the annual meeting. It's hard to find issues to get people active because there are no choices. They have you.
Q: The markups are big then?
A: There's no rhyme or reason to them. We checked thirty common items in Sobey's and Dominion stores. Twenty-one were priced differently in different Domionion stores; seven differently in different Sobey's stores. A seven-pound bag of flour ranges from $1.47 to $2.52 at Dominion stores; from $1.47 to $2.10 at Sobey's stores.
Q: Were prices higher in the poor districts?
A: No, we were looking for that. There was no pattern. It wasn't old and new stock either. It's mainly lack of competition.
Q: What's the biggest single difference between Newfoundland and the mainland?
A: The brokers, or jobbers. They go back to when Newfoundland was not part of Canada and almost all food was being imported. One brand comes into Newfoundland through one broker — no matter how powerful the brand is. So there's no competition, really. You'll notice that all the stores will run out of a certain item all at the same time. Once there was no kitty litter available for three months. The brokers are also the people who get contracts from government to supply to Labrador, where the government runs the food stores. The managers at the stores have no real say in what comes, no way of checking on quality. So they get bad food.

A FARMER AND THE CONSUMERS' ASSOCIATION

At the Halifax hearing, there was a fascinating conversation between Dorothy Grant, consumer advocate with CBC Halifax, and Alfred Nieforth, a Halifax county farmer. We reconstruct part of it here.

A.N.: The Consumers' Association of Canada . . . keeps kicking the farmer.
D.G.: Do you really think the CAC attacks the farmer?
A.N.: There is such a thing as being an unwitting tool. If your enemy shoots you in a war and kills you, or if your friend shoots you accidentally when you're hunting and kills you, it's all the same thing. You must remember we are all consumers, all buying from the same people.

Why, for instance, do you want consumers on the marketing boards and not on the boards of directors of the multinationals? Why no consumer on the board of Stelco [a steel manufacturer]?
D.G.: The Consumers' Association is naturally interested in food. . . . Maybe Stelco doesn't affect you if you're feeding your family, but food is something we all deal with.
A.N.: Surely to God you can see what's going on and stop harping on one small segment of society that can't defend themselves in any way. And you should know the effect of the price of steel on the price of milk. We buy tractor parts, stable cleaner parts, you name it. It's all tied together in one neat little package.

Agriculture Movement, Calgary, Alta.)

Fishermen are faced with the same problem, according to Hass Lindblad of Nova Scotia, who said that "Capital and maintenance costs have doubled and tripled in the last few years. A sixty-five-foot boat in Nova Scotia now costs $1 million."

Many producers who have avoided selling out try instead to increase their revenue by producing more: "So one year they say I have to produce twelve pigs per sow per year, next year it's going to be fourteen,

FARM INCOME

There is an old story (hardly a joke) about the farmer who won a million dollars in a lottery. When asked what he intended to do, he said he thought he'd just go on farming until the money was gone.

It is impossible to make definitive statements about average net farm income for at least two reasons. First, there is no clear definition of a farm, and so no way of counting farmers in Canada. For instance, Census Canada used to count as farms all operations which made at least $250 a year, but in 1976 they raised the minimum to $1200. This makes "average income" figures go up. Besides, there are at least two ways of calculating net farm income. In Table 1 below, Agriculture Canada economists have used farm families' tax returns. In Table 2, Statistics Canada has added up the value of produce sold and deducted certain farm costs. These second average income figures are considerably higher than the first.

However, three main points can be made:

1. Farm income is extremely variable. This is the main conclusion from the second table below.
2. Farmers are, on the average, making less than other Canadians. Table 1 shows that the proportion of farm families classified as low-income is larger than the proportion of poor among all Canadian families (where the poverty rate is about twenty per cent. While Table 2 speaks of "farm income" and not "farm families' income", still it shows farmers making about half what the average Canadian household made in 1978 ($21,346).
3. Many people lose money farming. In 1976 the net average income from farming of low-income farm families (part and full-time) was a loss of $115. Part-time low-income farmers lost an average of $1211 on their farm operations. (These figures are from the same source as Table 1.)

A farmers' market in Regina, Sask.

TABLE 1

Proportion of farm taxfiler families earning less than $6584 in 1976

	% Full-time	% Part-time	% All Families
Canada	35.8	19.1	28.3
Atlantic	51.9	26.1	37.9
Quebec	41.7	20.2	33.1
Ontario	37.6	16.5	26.5
Prairies	32.9	20.7	28.1
B.C.	44.5	15.4	24.5

Source: W. Darcovich and D. Leng, "Low Income Farm Families in 1976" *Canadian Farm Economics,* vol. 14, no. 5.

TABLE 2

Net Farm Income

	Net Total Income of Farm Operators from Farming Operations a)			Number of Census Farms in 1976 b)	Average Income	
	1976 (000's)	1978 (000's)	% Change		1976	1978
P.E.I.	60,299	20,325	− 66	3,054	19,744	6,655
N.S.	30,565	48,705	+ 59	3,441	8,882	14,154
N.B.	49,712	29,938	− 40	3,244	15,324	9,228
Que.	388,298	459,257	+ 18	43,079	9,014	10,656
Ont.	813,528	730,387	− 10	76,983	10,567	9,487
Man.	359,162	336,033	− 6	29,936	11,986	11,215
Sask.	1,423,999	910,178	− 36	69,578	20,466	13,081
Alta.	722,652	617,265	− 15	57,310	12,609	10,770
B.C.	192,113	114,086	− 41	13,033	14,740	7,739
Canada	4,040,328	3,266,174	− 19	300,118	13,462	10,882

a) Source: *Farm Net Income* 1976 and 1978. Statistics Canada #21-202.
b) Source: *1976 Census of Canada. Agriculture.* Catalog 96-800 (Bulletin 11)

next sixteen, next eighteen until finally it becomes absurd because nature and economics get out of balance." (Charles Hubbard, farmer, Cumberland Co., N.S.) But producing more doesn't seem to get producers off the hook. Many turn to outside jobs to support their farms.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE FARMERS GONE?

What are we going to do with our people? They would be far better involved farming and keeping their skills than in getting shipped off somewhere to be a burden. I think it's a political move to foster paternalism and make as many people as possible dependent on government so they can control them.

On this business of removing the people from rural Canada. I think a good lot of it was to secure cheap, easily managed labour in the industrial sector. The farm boys, first generation into the factory would say, "Look at that, three dollars an hour! Daddy only gave me two bucks a month."

— Alfred Nieforth, farmer,
Halifax County, N.S.

"Even though Canadian farmers produced $2,000 more in agricultural products per farmer than any country in the world, we have developed a nation of part-time farmers (fifty-two per cent of the farmers' income in 1977 was earned off the farm)." (Murray Wenstob, Swan River, Man.) "Over eighty-eight per cent of B.C. farmers work off the farm at least part of the year to help support their families. A growing trend is for farm wives to seek off-farm income as well." (Ruth Veiner, NFU, Dawson Creek, B.C.)

Increasing production costs have forced farm families to seek outside employment and have also made it almost impossible to pay for farm labour. "What keeps a lot of farms going is slave labour. . . .

OFF-FARM EMPLOYMENT

A further indicator of the fragmentation taking place within the farm community can be assessed from the reported days, contained in the 1976 census, of off-farm work by farm operators. In total, 15,130,404 days were reported by 93,199 operators averaging 32.5 five-day weeks.

Percentage of Farm Operators with Off-Farm Employment According to 1976 Census

Under 3 acres: 41%	400-559 acres: 28%
3 - 9 acres: 44%	560-759 acres: 25%
10-69 acres: 55%	760-1119 acres: 19%
70-239 acres: 37%	1120-1599 acres: 15%
240-399 acres: 32%	1600 and over: 11%

These figures do not include cases where a second family member has off-farm employment.

— National Farmers Union,
Regina, Sask.

If your wife happens to be a school teacher, a nurse or a bookkeeper and can go outside and make a living then you can be quite efficient! But a farmer who has to depend on himself and hired help, then he isn't quite as efficient as a guy who can exploit his family. I think the cloak should be pulled away and let the urban people realize how many slaves have been keeping these glorious romantic family farms going." (Alfred Nieforth, farmer, Halifax County, N.S.)

FARM WOMEN: A NATIONAL FARMERS UNION SURVEY

No one should have to work a lifetime as a farm wife and be considered less than a person.

What kind of work do farm women do?

One thing that farm women have in common with just about all other women in Canada is that they have to do housework. . . . Half the farm women regularly operate machinery. . . . Seventy-five per cent of them regularly help with barn chores. . . . Fifty-seven per cent of the women interviewed were the farm bookkeepers. . . . Many do administrative tasks, such as banking, and keeping breeding and registration records. Eighty-four per cent took part in major farm business decisions.

Women protect farm investments by helping with machinery and building repair and upkeep work. . . . They gather, grade and deliver such products as eggs, vegetables and fruits. Most farm families have a large garden. Usually the farm woman organizes this and does most of the work. Then she spends hours canning, freezing and preserving the fruits (and vegetables) of her labour.

In all cases it falls to the farm wife to provide meals and occasionally accommodation for [farm] workers. Sometimes, too, she has the job of hiring and supervising them. . . . Women fill silos, unload and grind grain, draw manure, dehorn cattle, debeak turkeys, castrate pigs, load and truck livestock to pasture and market, and pick stones. Much of women's farm work is done on an "on

call" basis.... Often women take over when their husbands get an off-farm job, or obtain off-farm employment themselves....

Does Recognition of Women's Work Matter?

Eighteen per cent of the women surveyed were not interested in receiving a wage for their work.... "It all comes out of the same pocket so why give it a label?"

On the other hand, over half the women definitely wanted a wage.... "I would like to be paid for my work instead of having to ask for cash."

Present living conditions and psychological well-being are one matter. For most women though, the real problems come later. Unexpectedly, their situation may change. Their marriage may end in death or divorce. Too late the woman discovers what "share and share alike" means to the law. Even though she may have worked side by side with her husband on the farm for twenty or thirty years, a woman is not automatically entitled to half the assets.

If the marriage ends by death, she could be disinherited by her husband's will, necessitating a court battle.

If it ends in divorce, she is entitled only to maintenance.

Many women have discovered too late that by working without wages, they have no Canada Pension Plan benefits of their own to fall back on, and are entitled to a share of their husband's pension only upon his death.

Seventy per cent of Canadian women over seventy are left with no income other than the government pension of approximately $250 a month.

— *Farm Women in our Society*, National Farmers Union Publication.

Very often farmers have no choice but to hire the only labour they can afford. That usually means being forced to exploit the labour of others. As Bill Gibbs in Gravelbourg, Sask., put it, "farm workers who have sold their labour to farm owners in return for wages have subsidized farm owners' income as well as their fellow consumers' income by working for extremely low wages and without the benefit of protection of minimum wage laws or workers' compensation."

Some farmers take pride in getting bigger. Others told the Commission that they don't want it. They don't want to work longer hours or exploit the labour of others. They don't want to buy more land, more equipment, and go deeper into debt. But they are faced with a choice: expand or leave farming altogether.

Simply producing more doesn't get farmers off the hook.

FARMING CAN BE DANGEROUS

We have the statistics. The injury rate in the farm sector is one of the very highest . . . not as high as logging or mining but it's higher than the average industrial rate of accidents.... Workers continue to die and they continue to die in a very traumatic way because of farm accidents.... It's industry and it's big business. There are victims all along, and the farmer is just as much a victim.

— Gary Cwitco, Centre for Labour Studies, Toronto, Ont.

"We don't want to get bigger. We've stayed debt free to date [since 1938]. We're in our sixties. Why would we want to get bigger? But we want to maintain our farm. It's a century farm.... As I told the Department [of agriculture] 'No wonder people sell their farms. We feel like selling too and being able to go to Florida every winter.' Let's face it. For six months of the year we're packing apples until dark. We pack some nights until twelve o'clock.

"If going in debt means more efficiency, I can't see it.... They say we are inefficient because we are debt free." (Marian Inglis, Annapolis Co., N.S.)

Who puts the farmers in this position? On the surface, it appears to be the government. Farmers pointed out to us that the federal government seems to be basing its policy decisions on a study done by its Task Force on Agriculture, released in 1969. This paper recommended that the government encourage a few large farms and let the rest go out of business — a course of action which certainly does not benefit most farmers. Who does benefit? Some people who made submissions to the Commission had never considered this question. Others said that the consumer benefits from cheaper food — but the submissions from those who are suffering the effects of higher food prices make that point of view hard to believe. Other people pointed to the manufacturers, which sell inputs and machinery to the farmers, and to the banks and financial institutions, which lend the money to buy these things.

> I returned to our family farm in 1971 only to get totally caught up in the recommendations of the Task Force of the 1970s.... These government studies wanted agriculture to become more mechanized, have less producing farm units and have them much larger. This has been accomplished through high pressure advertising

of 'Bigger is Better' and 'Buy now pay later'. Heavy industry has boomed by the increased production of equipment and the financial institutions have financed farmers over their capacity to repay the debt, to the point where farmers are only working for the bank. (Paul Windatt, Kingston, Ont.)

Farmers Buy, Too

"I'm a consumer as much as anybody in town," said one farmer at a hearing in Ardmore, Alberta.

Farmers often talked about "consumers", referring mostly to city dwellers who eat the food they produce. However, most of the pressure comes from those who want farmers to consume more. Machinery dealers, fertilizer manufacturers, real estate agents, bank managers and many other look at farmers as their best customers. The companies that sell to the farmers may be pleased with farmers' expenditures. Farmers certainly aren't! However, they cannot avoid it; they are surrounded. In order to sell milk, a farmer must buy the equipment required by the government and marketing boards. This was illustrated in Ontario when the courts ruled that the Old Order Amish farmers could not continue to market their milk in cans. There had not been any health problems with the milk coming from Amish farms, but the health regulations had been changed to say that all farmers must store their milk in a bulk cooler. For religious reasons, the Amish would not buy coolers and therefore went out of milk production.

If vegetable growers sell their produce to the processing companies, they can only do so under contract to certain companies. These companies demand that the farmer use certain quantities of seed, fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, ripening agents and other inputs on the crop.

Even when farmers do not face specific controls forcing the use of machinery and inputs, they often have large debts with high interest rates. The monthly payment at the bank demands that every acre of land produce as much as it is capable of producing all the time. The end result is farmers losing control over what they produce and how they produce it. "I have about as much control over the conditions of my labour as I did when I worked in a factory in Ontario," a potato farmer in Prince Edward Island said.

Is Farming Dangerous to Your Health?

"Food Production is basically a renewable activity," George Hiemstra in Salmon Arm, B.C., told the Commission. "Well, it could be, but the way things work, it isn't." One disturbing aspect of the position farmers hold as forced consumers is the growing use of agricultural chemicals.

HERBICIDES

Another ominous sign of the problems in our agricultural development model was the threat to the soil's productivity. Right near the highway, to the west of the village, was a field where an excellent farmer had grown corn for silage and was attempting to grow barley as part of his crop rotation program. During the summer I noticed ugly yellow patches where almost nothing was growing and where the barley was pitifully stunted. The farmer explained that a herbicide called Atrizine had affected the soil in such a way that nothing but corn would grow there for a number of years. Atrizine was so powerful, he said, that getting it onto the land was a nerve-wracking experience — the tiniest bit too much could destroy the field's productivity for years to come. People hated Atrizine, and some speculated on what the long-term effects would be for the soil when crop rotation was difficult or impossible.

— Bonnie Greene, Toronto, Ont.

There's increasing concern on the part of farmers about the chemicals they are forced to use.

"In 1975 Canadians purchased the following: $127 million worth of herbicides; fungicides accounted for $9 million, seed treatments $4 million, insecticides $25 million, livestock pesticides $3 million. The home and small package trade had sales of $23 million and miscellaneous sales were $3 million for a grand total of $194 million." (Evelyn Potter, Harris, Sask.)

Farmers seem to be increasingly concerned about the safety of the chemicals they are forced to use: "Twenty per cent [of 3,300 farmers interviewed] reported they suffered from chemical exposure in 'spraying season'," reported the Back-to-the-Farm

Research Foundation in Harris, Sask. "When we used Furdan, my brother became very ill after following the seeder for one day," Robert Parker of Pictou County, N.S., told the Commission.

Some farmers argue that the chemicals are a necessary risk. However, people who study this problem say that chemicals are at best a short-term solution for agricultural problems. Jeanette Trambel is one of those people. She tabled a report with the Commission in Edmonton which showed that despite an increase in the use of pesticides from about 100 million pounds in 1947 to about 1.1 billion pounds in 1974, crop losses in the United States due to pests have not declined but have remained at an estimated thirty-three per cent. She said that crop losses caused by insects have nearly doubled, increasing from about seven per cent in the 1942-1951 period to about thirteen per cent in 1974.

The Citizens' Association for a Safe Environment in Victoria, B.C., agreed that chemical farming is not the best route to go. In its brief, the Association attacked the myth that chemical farming is more productive than organic farming which uses natural fertilizers and avoids pesticides and herbicides. "The research carried out by the U.K. Soil Association disproves this myth. . . . Furthermore, evidence indicates that a number of organic products have better nutritional values."

In the Third World, as in Canada, small farmers have been pushed off their land and have joined the unemployed in mushrooming urban areas.

Starving the Soil

Pesticides, herbicides and fungicides are a risk to the health of farmers. The other main class of agricultural chemicals, fertilizers, puts the health of the soil at risk.

Gerald Davern, a farmer who testified to the inquiry in Kingston, Ont., discussed what was to him an overwhelming use of chemical fertilizers. "In grain crop or cash crop production, no natural fertilizers are produced. Therefore, chemical fertilizers must be used. Continuous use of these expensive chemical fertilizers causes the soil to lose

THE GREEN REVOLUTION

What is the Green Revolution? In the 1960s, plant breeders introduced new varieties of grain which could produce spectacularly high yields under ideal conditions. These seeds were heralded as the end of world hunger. But there is a catch. The problem lies in the words "under ideal conditions".

Traditional crops grown in poor countries were developed over a period of centuries to produce food under many weather, insect or disease conditions. The stalks might be tall to allow the grains to get more sun and stay ahead of the weeds. The plants would be hardy, and any field might contain hundreds of different varieties, to be sure that some would survive. The plants also would produce their own seed; a farmer could save some grain and plant it again the next year. The grains would grow alongside beans and legumes, and all together they provide a high protein diet.

The new varieties introduced are short-stemmed, genetically uniform, and vulnerable to insects, weeds and dry weather. They require chemical fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides and fungicides as well as good irrigation. If any one of these elements is missing, the new varieties will produce less than the traditional ones. Also, since these plants are hybrids, farmers must buy their seeds every year.

When these "miracle seeds" are introduced into a poor farming area, only the largest of the farmers can afford the "ideal conditions". As the yield for these farmers goes up, they dominate the market. Smaller farmers fall further and further behind, get into debt they cannot get out of, and eventually leave their farms. The larger farmers buy the smaller farms and become even bigger. The smaller farmers take jobs on the big farms. However, as soon as the large farmer can afford to mechanize, he does. It is to his advantage to replace human labour with machinery. The small farmer is then left with nothing. And another family goes off to join the destitute unemployed on the edges of the big cities.

Because the large landholders can sell their grain for a higher price on the export market, they have no interest in growing the beans, lentils and other local crops on which the people of the area rely. The price of food goes up and the supply of protein goes down.

The result of the Green Revolution, then, is ironic. Food production in the Third World has increased, but the number of malnourished and starving people has risen just as rapidly. The Green Revolution has been a success in terms of corporate profits; a disaster in terms of human life.

its fibre content and thus become harder, causing poorer drainage and requiring greater power for cultivation."

In other words, as another farmer, Ron Christie, put it to the London hearing, "Chemicals feed the plant, but not the soil." The nitrogen used in fertilizers burns out the tilth, the organic element of the soil. As Christie said, "This is especially serious in continuous corn cropping, because year after year there are 100 to 150 units of nitrogen per acre added to that land. In my area there are fields which have been in corn for ten, twelve years. There are areas of Ontario now which are virtually solid corn."

Gerald Davern's solution would be to plant fields with a "green manure crop", or legumes, and allow them to lie fallow. The question that arises from this, he said to the Commission, is why aren't farmers growing green manure crops or using crop rotation? And his answer: "Many farmers are faced with immediate financial commitments and for economic reasons are forced to keep all land under full production."

A plantation in the Honduras: lots of bananas, but not much else.

But if soil is damaged by fertilizers, how can we better understand this pressure on farmers to use them? In his brief, Ron Christie told the commissioners how farmers are pushed to consume more and more "inputs" in their work:

> Alfalfa is just as suitable [as corn] for feeding beef, and in energy terms, alfalfa stays constant for a number of years . . . you just harvest it. Not like corn that every year has to be ploughed, cultivated, nitrogen added to it, sprayed — the difference is almost laughable. But we've been sold corn. Ten years ago every agricultural college was just pushing corn. Most farmers who grow corn now feel that they're progressive modern farmers. . . . The large agribusiness concerns — it comes back to the same basic thing — large corporations selling fertilizer, selling seeds, selling machinery, selling fuel; they make money on it.

A Chemical Feast

Farmers expressed concern about being exposed to chemicals when they apply them; they also wondered about eating the food which has been exposed to these chemicals: "Most people don't realize how much pesticide has to go on vegetables. You can wash off the residue but not what's soaked in. . . . Some of those chemicals go right through your hand so why wouldn't they go through a tomato?" (Robert Parker, Pictou County, N.S).

John Harrison told the Richmond, B.C. inquiry that chemicals, "this vast array of poisonous,

MONOCULTURE

One reason is that we like uniform products, we like them to plant, we like them to put on the shelves, we like them to make laws about. The best way to produce uniform products is to grow uniform plants, so we produce hybrid seeds. . . and once you have genetically uniform plants you have to use pesticides. There is absolutely no way out of it. Because an insect, once it gets around any inhibitions it has about eating something, it has the whole thing ahead of it. . . . Whereas if there is genetic diversity, one insect will eat a little bit and not like the rest of it and leave it alone. . . . We have eliminated much diversity in our habitat so that the balance between natural enemies is lost. . . .

It's generally recognized now that in the Third World, ecologically-based systems are the only ones that are going to feed the poor. . . . If you look at the actual costs of producing food and the income of a family in India, they simply cannot afford food that is produced with the amount of energy input that is put into intensive agriculture. . . .

CIDA [Canadian International Development Agency] is trying to encourage eco-development policies because the intensive systems have been a disaster, to tropical areas in particular. Really they are here too, but it's a long term disaster which we do not recognize so readily. We are going to pay for the type of agriculture that we are practising now, in the future.

We are losing top-soil, we are losing nutrients, we are losing diversity. We are losing gene pools. . . .

You can get away with it for a long time as long as you keep dumping fertilizer into the soil. It's the only reason we can get away with it now. . . . But sometime it will go — just like that. It's interesting that the first civilization, Mesopotamia . . . went under as a civilization principally because of practices that turned out to be bad land use in the long run.

— David Patriquin, biologist, Halifax, N.S.

dangerous materials that are supplied for agricultural use", are being prescribed as a remedy for poor agriculture. He said that "To poison your neighbour's food classes you with the Borgias. To poison the food of a nation is treachery. And to mutilate the seed of posterity is possibly the greatest crime that humanity can commit. Yet it's being done wholesale. And everybody accepts it."

Consumers are also concerned about eating food produced with chemical fertilizers and feed additives, food treated with herbicides, pesticides and drugs. Besides the chemicals used to produce food, many additives, including large quantities of sugar, salt and fat, are applied during food processing, and then nutrients are lost during processing and shipping. It all adds up to food that looks good, but doesn't nourish as much as it should, food which often puts our health at risk.

Olivia Fairholm testified to this effect in Victoria, B.C., when she expressed her concern over the problem of "harmful chemical changes" in food and the impossibility for consumers, even those who are on their guard, of ever knowing exactly which chemicals are present in a particular product — and whether or not the chemicals are harmful. "Testers use animals rather than humans. The results . . . are inconclusive. . . . For instance, humans are ten times more sensitive to thalidomide than the baboon, twenty times more than the monkey, sixty times more than the rabbit, over one hundred times more than the rat, two hundred times more than the armadillo and the dog, and seven hundred times more than the cat. . . ."

But even if we know what chemicals are in the food, there's the danger of a cumulative effect. "At dinner time we have several vegetables on the plate. The potatoes have a safe amount of chemical A and a safe amount of chemical B and a safe amount of chemical C. The carrots have a safe amount of chemical D and a safe amount of chemical E and so on. By the time you get to the end of the meal you have quite a lot of safe amounts." (John Harrison, Richmond, B.C.) Eating out adds a little more mystery. As Olivia Fairholm put it, "We have some idea of what we are buying from the grocery shelves, but how can we possibly know what we are eating when we breakfast at McDonalds, snack from vending machines, or live in residence."

PLAYING WITH EVOLUTION

These compounds that we now find entering the food chain, many of which are placed there deliberately and many not deliberately, are difficult to assess in terms of their effect — their genetic effect. . . .

These genetic effects of chemicals are usually referred to as mutations — these are changes in the hereditary material. . . . We know that the species which are on earth today can be likened to finely tuned automobile engines. Random changes to these organisms, and particularly random changes to their genetic potential are by and large going to be deleterious. . . .

These genetic changes can occur in two different types of cells. The first is in the body cells. Changes in the genetic information in these cells we now know can result in many different types of cancer. . . . Those changes are not heritable; they will not be passed on. They can almost be viewed as toxic effects. The other type of change, which I am most concerned about, involves changes in the genetic information of those cells which we pass on to the next generation, the germ cells, sperm and egg. Changes in the genetic information carried by these cells are difficult to assess. It will reach an expression of one sort or another not in the individual who produced those cells, but in the offspring of those people. Genetic damage of this sort will not be observed in the present generation, only in subsequent generations. And it's important to note here that this genetic damage is irreversible. You can not remove the cause and thus remove the effect. Once the genetic change is made, it is permanent and the origin of that genetic change . . . may well never be known. . . .

As our technology now develops for assessing the mutagenicity of molecules — and it is developing in leaps and bounds — we are finding that we are virtually living in a sea of mutagens created by ourselves, created primarily during this century, molecules which we have never been confronted with before, molecules which are potentially mutagenic in humans because they have been identified as mutagenic in a wide variety of test organisms. Many of these compounds . . . are in fact being used in the food processing industry today. At the time, they had been tested and found to be safe by all known criteria. We now know that this is not the case. When we contest the use of these, we are confronted by the food processing industry with the request that we document the mutagenicity of these compounds in man, which of course we cannot do.

— Dr. John Phillips, geneticist,
University of Guelph, Ont.

PROFITS AND CHEMICALS

This concern for profit leads to the denaturing of food in various ways for the purpose of a "long shelf life"; because, if the food does not move rapidly, it may deteriorate to the point where it has to be thrown out. From the point of view of the food manufacturer, it is better that its actual food value should deteriorate so long as the product itself does not go bad. Hence we have a multitude of methods to preserve it — refining, processing, canning, the addition of a host of chemical additives, synthetic flavours, colours, odours, etc., all, according to one doctor I heard on the radio, "to enhance food" ! . . .

I sometimes wonder who coined the phrase "food manufacturers" because that is exactly what they are. They manufacture food. . . . Emphasis is usually put on the high cost of food, but most food on the market today is too much at any price, because, while it comes into the category of food, it is not nourishment, or not sufficiently so.

— Eve Smith, Victoria, B.C.

For some people it is no longer a question of wondering about what might happen. It has already happened. They have suffered grave side effects of food additives. "I have personally experienced a penicillin reaction from eating steak which must have come from an animal treated with the drug." (Elizabeth Neave, Kingston, Ont.)

Thelma Lindsay said in Windsor, Ont. that she was able to discover only by trial and error that certain foods and food additives were causing her to be "violently ill", in the form of severe migraine headaches. When she eliminated various food items from her diet, her health improved. According to her, Canadian citizens are the guinea pigs when it comes to food testing.

Hank and Audrey Boer, of Welland, Ont., also made their own discovery: a connection between hypertension and food additives. "Our second child and first son, now aged twelve, has for nine years been very hyper. At school he was labelled as hyperkinetic or learning disabled. This condition has caused many a heartache in our home. Also a very low feeling of self-worth for our son. After many trips to the doctors and counsellors we finally came to know about the effects of food additives such as colours and flavours. . . . Here is where the problem really started." The family had to begin reading labels more carefully: "We never realized how many chemicals it took to make just one loaf of bread or cookies." They had to give up desserts, most soups, cake mixes, toothpaste. "The thing we find difficult to take is that the basics such as butter, margarine, cheese, most baked goods, most medication, all contain artificial colouring and flavouring."

Jean Walmsley in London, Ont., described an eighteen-year nightmare as a hyperactive adult, and also ended up relating that to the food she was eating: "I was constantly hostile, aggressive, exhausted, hyperactive, verbally abusive and occasionally physically abusive towards my two children. . . . I became severely depressed, and even entertained thoughts of suicide."

What's in that drink? A display at the Harris, Sask. hearing by the Rosetown chapter of the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association.

Consultation with eleven different doctors brought prescription drugs and further aggravation of the problem. Finally, through a book by Dr. Ben Feingold, *Why Your Child Is Hyperactive*, Jean discovered that the cause of her problem was food additives.

Ina Miller, in Harris, Sask., was able to show that this widespread and deeply felt concern about diet is well founded: "Elsie Sokol at North York Branson Hospital in Toronto says her surveys indicate that forty per cent of all hospital patients in their forties and fifties are in there for health breakdown caused mainly by poor diet."

A Government Watch-dog?

You'd think, given the serious effects of chemicals in our food, that the government would be on top of the question. Those who have looked into this issue have been disappointed.

Elmer Laird, who gained some small fame in 1979 when the Saskatchewan government refused to pay him crop insurance because he does not use herbicides, spoke to the Commission in Harris, Sask., in the name of the Back to the Farm Research Foundation: "I asked Dr. W.P. McKinley [Director-General of the Food Directorate Division, Health Protection Branch, Health and Welfare Canada] who was doing research on the combined effects on soil, people, and food of the 400 chemicals that were available to farmers. He said, 'There are over 400 chemicals available to farmers today.' He went on to say, 'No one is doing any research

HYPERKINESIS

We are presently dealing with epidemic proportions of hyperkinesis, learning disability, juvenile delinquency, alcohol and drug abuse, and disturbances classified as "mental" or "emotional" and these are the areas we wish to discuss. . . . Many learning-disabled children, as well as the hyperkinetic and those classed as behavioural problems or emotionally disturbed, are in fact, pellagrins. Or perhaps have a level of sprue, or scurvy. Often this is due to bad diet, sometimes to allergy, pre-diabetic condition, or to prenatal deficiency due to the same condition of the mother. Again, a diet low in refined starches, and with sufficient protein and plenty of fresh vegetables and fruits will improve learning capacity and control hyperkinesis and other behaviour problems to a level which obviates the need for special education, counselling, family break-up, all of which are an expense to the tax-payer.

— Canadian Schizophrenic Assn., Victoria, B.C.

HANDICAPPED PEOPLE: THEIR CONCERNS

There are several points I want to bring to your attention:

1. Malnutrition is the leading cause of blindness in the world . . . not just lack of food, but lack of adequate food. . . . One out of eight hundred people in Canada is blind, but the Northwest Territories has more than twice that. Our suspicion is that the situation there is related to malnutrition, as well as the lack of medical care. . . .

2. People can be handicapped by what they eat and what is in their food. Birth defects are the most striking example of this.

3. There is a lack of information in a form blind people can use about any of the aspects of this Commission. If I wanted to find out about additives in food, about multinational corporations, about farm problems . . . it's virtually non-existent.

4. I want to draw to your attention the incredible poverty and unemployment among blind and handicapped people. Canadian National Institute for the Blind statistics indicate that more than half of blind people live below the poverty line in Canada, and more than eighty per cent of the employable-aged blind people are unemployed. . . . The lack of money limits the amount and choice of food one can buy. . . . It leads to very poor eating habits among the blind. You're likely to buy the most advertised brands . . . very likely the ones with the most additives. This leads to poor health, then more anxiety, higher medical costs. It's a vicious cycle. . . . Also, I think many institutionalized people are more handicapped than they need to be because of poor diets.

5. While pretty packaging has no importance for blind people . . . we're trapped, just like everyone else, into paying for it.

6. Stores are often not accessible. . . . A wheelchair can't get into them. . . . Aisles are narrow. . . . Turnstiles are difficult. . . . Aisles are cluttered. . . . If nothing else, it's a great source of anxiety. You're always afraid you're going to bring down a whole display case of jars or something. It has happened to me a few times. . . . It's also hard to get help. You can stand there for an hour and not get help. We've developed a technique which does work and that is to put yourself near a cash register — which you can usually find by listening — and say in a very loud voice, "If I don't get help in a couple of minutes, I'm going to start knocking stuff down." Usually you get help immediately!

— Michael Yale, BOOST (Blind Organization of Ontario using Self-help Tactics)

For six years I lived in a variety of apartments and communes and so on, and one of the biggest problems, which was a psychological nightmare for me, was the whole question of dependency for everyday foods. . . . I did not want to depend on my friends for the daily necessities of life because it really wrecks a relationship. This became a preoccupation of my mind, so much so, it came to dominate my life and that is why I moved into Bellwoods, a government residence for disabled people.

Bellwoods has always had catered food. . . . The quality of the food is not good and there is often not enough or people can't eat it. The meat is tough and you ask them to cut it up, and they do, but not in bite-sized pieces. So what are you going to do? . . . Disabled people deserve good, nutritional meals. . . . There should be some kind of control on caterers who go into institutions. I brought up the whole idea of getting our own cook. . . . However, that idea was thrown back in my face by the administrator. He said, "well, what would you do if your cook didn't show up?" . . . I don't see why we as disabled people should have to put up with the food they serve.

— John Kellerman, Bellwoods Residence, Toronto.
John has cerebral palsy.

because no one can afford that kind of research.' He said, 'Only an agency such as the United Nations could afford to do that kind of research, and only if all the industrial nations decided to pool their chemical research money and gave it to the United Nations.'

"Farmers are not aware," Elmer Laird added, "that the cancer rate among them is very high. The government is not providing money for research or information to farmers." It is little wonder, then, that when people press the government about the testing of a specific chemical, the responses are vague. "The nitrates in hot dogs have been outlawed in nine countries," said Dr. Nona Rowat, in Vancouver, B.C. So far nitrates haven't been banned in Canada.

Most of us have only the labels on the packages to go by, so we rely on the government to police those labels. But Korky Day of Vancouver did some research and found fifty-two separate loopholes that allow manufacturers not to say what is in their products. In addition, Korky said, manufacturers have many "tricks" which allow them to avoid the labelling regulations. "In one case you have to tear the seam of the bag to read what's on the whole list of ingredients. In another, the colour of the print is similar to the background."

"What I didn't realize was that there's no place on the [cereal] box that says there is fifty or fifty-five per cent sugar. So, for most parents who only see a list of the vitamins stretched out, there's no way that they know that what they're feeding their children is candy, essentially." (*Consumer Report* [March, 1978] tabled Victoria, B.C.)

While the Food and Drug Act says, "No person shall sell an article of food that has in or upon it any poisonous or harmful substance," Wilfred Ross of Swan River, Man., told the Commission that the legal definition of food additives does not include materials such as salt, sugar, starch, vitamins, mineral nutrients, amino acids, spices, seasoning and flavouring preparation, agricultural chemicals, food packaging materials.

A Medical Watch-dog?

If the government doesn't help us, what can we expect from the medical profession? Health problems arising from what we eat seem to escape most doctors. A member of the audience in Meadow Lake, Sask., said: "Vets always ask you what you are feeding when they come to look at a cow. Seventy-five per cent of animal health problems are related to feeding. Why don't doctors ever ask the same question?"

Some of the most critical remarks the Commission received came from people who pointed out that the medical profession seems to ignore nutritionally-based health problems. These submissions made a connection between the medical profession and the food and drug industries. For instance: "Our 'health agencies' seem to suffer from a commerciogenic disability which prevents them from understanding the significance of data, no matter how overwhelming, that tend to threaten the market requirements of the food and drug industry." (Tom Anderson, Penticton, B.C.)

"Our universities are riddled with corporate influence, peddled by the multinational companies who control the chemical/agriculture complex from grower to distributor," Croft Woodruff said in Vancouver. Woodruff argued that the American Cancer Society seemed to be more on the side of the U.S. chemicals industry than interested in fighting disease. The cancer society, he said, "will rail against cigarettes . . . but not against food additives, known carcinogens put into our food to enhance its saleability."

In Harris, Sask., Ina Miller cited a doctor (Glen Greene of Prince Albert) who had made the same allegation: "Nutrition represents a serious threat to some powerfully entrenched groups. Medicine as it is practised today is big business. The drug companies and multinational food corporations have powerful lobbies. Look at their profits. . . . It's not really in their profit interest to have people eat better food . . . and take fewer drugs. They'd lose money." And Doctors R.H. and M.V. Rogers told the Vancouver hearing, "The real battle against disease may have to be fought in the marketplace."

SUICIDAL TEENAGERS AND ADDITIVES?

I am enclosing two articles for your perusal. They were both in the *Globe and Mail* on March 29. . . . To me there was a direct co-relation between the articles. . . . One mentions that more and more teenagers and even younger children are having suicidal tendencies and they give many of the reasons they think this happens but nowhere do they mention nutrition. The other article, by Dr. Gifford-Jones, mentions that sugar can bring on the blues. In this day and age, as you know, they [the food manufacturers] are putting more and more sugar in our foods whether we want it or not (I myself am allergic to sugar and find this an annoyance) so therefore I think that these teenagers are just at the age where eating these kinds of foods for so long is having a suicidal effect.

This may be an over-simplification, of course, but I do read a lot of books on good nutrition and find this problem, plus others like chemical additives and food colouring, etc., are really frightening in a lot of ways. These kids may just be some of the ones who are suffering.

— Ruth Stanley, Toronto, Ont.

The PFC went to school: Grades 5 and 6 of the Elementary and Junior High School, Hanley, Sask.

They Serve Consumers, Don't They?

By now a picture is unfolding of a profit-oriented, industrial system of food production which serves up food lacking in nutritional value, or even dangerous, at ever rising prices. Many people are aware of the situation and are counteracting it by forming food co-ops, growing their own food, doing research and educating the public. Others are aware of it, but because they do not have the income, skills, mobility or support, cannot do much to fight the situation.

A group of mothers on welfare said in a brief: "The majority of places to shop do not sell the food at a reasonable cost, what we want to buy. Nearly everything you buy has sugar in it, or chemical additives. The food we buy today does not have the flavour of food in years gone by. Porridge and white bread are a bunch of goo." (Scott Mission Mothers' Group, Toronto, Ont.)

An alternative to McDonald's: the Bread and Broth Co-op Restaurant in Saskatoon.

Most of us were taught that the food industry exists to serve its customers, to give customers what they want. The testimony we received is just the opposite. The food industry spends much time, energy and money controlling consumer demand and directing people towards the items it wants to sell. How does it do this? Through addiction, advertising, packaging and control of the market.

"There seems almost a conspiracy on the part of the food industries to keep us all hooked on salt and sugar right from the baby food industry to the pallid invalid diet at the Old Folks' Home." (Ruth Masters, Courtenay, B.C.)

Ruth is backed up in her surmise by the testimony of several professionals across the country. Dr. Glen Greene came from Prince Albert to Saskatoon, Sask., to tell us:

> The poorer the quality of the food, the greater is our desire for that food. By this I mean the more the food has been robbed of its original natural ingredients, of its wholeness, the greater is the desire for the food because the body has been fooled by the processing and we search for that which is not there.... The more junk we eat the more we want, we become hooked on the junk foods....
>
> Addiction is the mechanism which keeps most of us in the same path of ill health. The food we like best is the food we should not eat.... The reason for the big success of McDonalds and the like is not hard to fathom: they serve what the people, in their befuddled state, think they want.

Dr. Rene Roth reported the findings of his laboratory experiments in London, Ont. When rats were fed a low-protein diet, and then were offered a choice between starch and protein, they chose protein; when the choice was between sugar and protein, they chose sugar. Dr. Roth's conclusion:

> a) Rats are able to select a qualitatively well-balanced diet which can satisfy their nutrient requirements only when the diet does not contain sucrose (sugar).
> b) Sucrose appears to have an addictive effect on rats; this effect is enhanced by low protein intake.
> c) Sucrose is inducing the animals to eat additional amounts of food, increasing the caloric intake to harmful levels.

Or, as Dr. Nona Rowat of Vancouver said, "If animals are given junk food choices, they become junk food addicts."

Many briefs referred to advertising as

OBESITY

In a society which tends to reject obesity as a health hazard and as aesthetically undesirable, people are surrounded by food and encouraged to eat more of it, and at the same time encouraged to exercise less, so that they need less food but are inclined to overeat, with the result that they become obese, whereupon the usual treatment is administered and this is not only unsuccessful in the long term ... but also may be more harmful than the condition of obesity itself. A more absurd situation would be hard to imagine. The more suspicious among us could be forgiven for hypothesizing a conspiracy among the food industry, the weight-control industry and those who stand to gain out of the incidence of diseases associated with obesity. If someone had deliberately set out to set up such a state of affairs it would be difficult to see how a more successful fat-creating system could have been produced.

— Robert Paddick, London, Ont.

"brainwashing". In the light of the addictive nature of many of the foods advertised, the word starts to take on more reality. We frequently heard the complaint that advertising unduly influences children.

"[A mother] doesn't have facilities to put together a scintillating and exciting commercial on the pleasures of porridge." (St. Stephens United Church Study Group, Courtenay, B.C.) "TV is telling my [three-year-old] son what he wants to eat and what mother should buy." (Kathie Frazer, Kamloops, B.C.)

We also heard about the effects of advertising on adults: "I'm tired of reading whereby manufacturers and processors say we want prepackaged food. Bull! . . . Nobody asked me if I want things that way. I detest being told I want something by someone else. It's for their benefit, not mine." (Lloyd Deslippe, Amherstburg, Ont.)

Allen Shiffman and Sierra Warren of Kingston, Ont., reminded us not to forget the role of the food processors and their advertising in determining what we eat:

> They have cleverly devised a method of turning a four-cents-a-pound food like potatoes into a four-dollar-a-pound food like instant potato flakes or potato chips. They take a food like corn, remove all the nutrition from it, add a few of the cheapest laboratory-made vitamins, enough preservatives to make it last forever, coat it with sugar, and have a tiger in a trenchcoat convince us we should buy it.
>
> Want to have a happy family? Television has convinced many, on a subliminal level at least, that the way to do that is to spend money on Jello, a food with almost zero nutrition. And if we want natural foods, the processors somehow find a way to take what we want out of them, put what we don't want into them, and extract a lot of money from them by convincing us that they're "natural".

The cost of packaging came up in many places. "The apricot boxes cost more than the apricots." (Comment from audience, Kelowna, B.C.)
"It costs each Canadian about $100 a year for packages." (Committee for Justice and Liberty, Toronto, Ont.)
"It takes nearly twice as much energy to process and package food as it does to produce it." (Consumers' Association of Canada, Brandon, Man.)
"Labour costs in the food industry are substantially less than the cost of packaging." (Alberta Federation of Labour, Calgary, Alta.)

Some packaging is necessary to provide freshness and convenience for some foods. However, people pointed out that most items in the supermarkets are wrapped and packed beyond necessity. The reason? To get us to consume more. The packages are colourful, glossy; but above all, they give an aura of cleanliness. A woman at a Halifax hearing recalled her impressions as a child going into the first Steinberg's in Montreal: "It was bright, but mainly it was clean. No more musty smells in dingy little grocery stores." Over the years we have been coached by thousands of ads and packages to prefer germ-free, worm-free, colourful food to nutritious food.

"It takes nearly twice as much energy to process and package food as it does to produce it." The Fraser Valley Frosted Foods factory in Chilliwack, B.C.

"The technological food system treats crops grown by the farmer not as food, but as raw material to be manipulated and manufactured into numerous products. . . . The objective of the food industry is to develop palatable products that sell well. Nutritional factors, in its opinion, contribute nothing to palatability, so they are not emphasized." (Olive Balabanov, Richmond, B.C.)

Surrounded by Supermarkets

The last method which the food companies use to control consumer demand is control over the marketplace. They try to surround us so that we will have no choice but to buy what they want us to buy.

The majority of Canadians now buy their food at one of the few large supermarket chains that dominate the Canadian market. "Supermarkets have increased their control of the retail market in Halifax from fourteen per cent in 1967 to sixty per cent in 1979." (Margaret Stewart, Halifax, N.S.) "We buy at Safeway, but we're basically forced into it." (Participant in discussion, Edmonton, Alta.)

Several groups told us about their experience with *The Supermarket Tour*, a critical handbook produced

by OPIRG, the Ontario Public Interest Research Group. A chart in the appendix of the handbook shows that the top four supermarkets in Thunder Bay control 98.4 per cent of the market; in Edmonton, it's 92.9 per cent; in Regina 87.7 per cent; St. John's, 86.5 per cent; Sault Ste. Marie, 86.4 per cent; Saskatoon, 83.2 per cent, and so on. With the market so firmly controlled by so few stores, there is not a great deal of choice.

MARKET CONTROL

Because supermarkets control such a large proportion of the grocery market, they are in a position to demand "under-the-table" payments for space in their stores, especially for eye-level and end-of-the-aisle shelves. A Dr. Hawkins told the Commission in Edmonton: "We have documented in the B.C. food inquiry, that in B.C. 2.2 per cent of retail sales value was received by the retailers in under-the-table arrangements. I didn't say 'illegal'. All I'm saying is that... the demand to try and get on the [supermarket shelves] is so tough and so hard that Safeway has suddenly found that selling food is not where the money is. The money is selling shelf space and advertising."

Dr. Hawkins' group catalogued fifteen different ways this money was collected.

On August 9, 1979, CBC News quoted David Nichol, President of Loblaw's Ontario, who admitted to the Royal Commission on Discounts that his firm received over $44 million (not the $14 million they had earlier reported to that Commission) in discounts and allowances of one kind or another. This was more than five per cent of gross sales.

This means that small retailers, who cannot demand these rebates, pay higher wholesale prices and small wholesalers cannot get their products onto the supermarket shelves.

John Murchie, whose family has had a specialized tea store for three generations, told the Vancouver hearing: "Just a few months ago, we launched out into the big 'Orange Pekoe' market.... We as a company have literally been shocked at the control the giant grocery chain-stores hold in this so-called 'free enterprise' system we claim to have in this country.... We have endeavoured... to make available a simple one-cent teabag to the consumer.... The resistance by the chains to allow us into this market has been unreal.

"Shelf space is given to [imported] items and local products are refused because, I believe, it would reveal their exorbitant profit structures."

In parts of cities built since 1950, "sound planning principles" did not allow the building of retail stores on the same streets as housing. Stores were concentrated into large malls, each mall with its own supermarket. People who live in these neighbourhoods tend to shop at the closest place — the supermarket in the mall.

The small, independent grocery-store operators who spoke with the Commission told us of their difficult fight for survival in the face of tactics used by the supermarket chains to drive them out.

"How can I survive when chain stores run loss leaders in produce every week?" John Ramage, the manager of Ram's Fruit Market in London, Ont. asked the Commission. "Sure, supermarkets sell imported tomatoes in January for eighty-nine cents a pound while mine will be $1.09, but they'll still be selling those same imported tomatoes in July for eighty-nine cents a pound when I will be selling local field tomatoes at 39 cents.... Unfortunately, the bargain hunter only sees the price in black and white in the 'women's section' of the newspaper. I think this is false economy. Since my advertising budget does not allow for such fancy weekly ads, I must depend on getting you to come back to my store after trying my produce once."

Once inside the supermarket, customers are surrounded by well-researched inducements to buy the high profit items. Groups who had used The Supermarket Tour told how the "tour" had shown the range of unavoidable selling techniques that confront people when they go into a store. As Odetta Keating said to the hearing in Penticton, B.C., options for shoppers have been limited by the particular kind of urbanization that has taken place in Canada. Shoppers are forced "to spend their food dollars in the tightly controlled net of the supermarkets."

When supermarket chains tighten their control on the market and drive smaller, independent stores out, they often leave poor neighbourhoods with nothing. The women of the Community Learning Centre in Rideau Heights, a low-cost housing development in Kingston, Ont., told us that their whole subdivision is served by three small corner grocery stores, plus a Becker's and Mac's Milk. These stores have higher prices than the supermarkets and do not carry enough stock to enable people to buy enough for a whole week at a time. For the people who live in Rideau Heights, especially those who don't have cars, it is time-consuming and expensive to travel to the nearest supermarket, three miles away.

Members from the Mothers' Group of the Scott Mission in Toronto, all on welfare or mother's allowance, told us that the supermarket in their housing development charged higher prices for basic foods than the suburban stores. A worker from the Mission confirmed this. He had done a survey over several weeks, and found that prices for hamburger, bread, macaroni and powdered milk were higher in the poor neighbourhoods. The supermarket chains, the Mothers' Group said, were taking advantage of the lack of mobility of their customers in that area.

Where Does the Money Go?

If food quality is going down while prices go up, who benefits? Clearly, not consumers. Food costs more — often more than the poor can afford to pay — while its nutritional quality is often not only low, but dangerous.

Farming and fishing people are also not gaining from the higher prices. Many of them are so badly squeezed between high costs and low prices that they are going out of business altogether. A farmer might be paid fifty-two cents a pound for pork that sells in the supermarket for $3.50 a pound; or a fisherman might get nineteen cents a pound for cod that sells for $1.75.

Where does the money go? Some of it, as we've seen, goes into advertising and packaging. But not all of it.

Some people told us that the group to blame is labour. "Only the government and unions are to blame for inflation. Unions greatly contribute to the cost of food. . . . The government doesn't dare to tell unions that if a man doesn't like the wages at his place of employment, he should look elsewhere." (Bill Devos, Medicine Hat, Alta.) But the Canadian Food and Allied Workers pointed out in their brief that only 8.5 per cent of the price of food goes to pay wages.

A fisherman might get nineteen cents a pound for cod that sells for $1.75.

WORKERS' INCOMES

There is a carefully cultivated myth in Canada that a direct relationship exists between the price of goods and the wages paid to workers who make or process the goods. This myth has taken deep root in the Canadian consciousness, even though the evidence of recent years and freely available government statistics demonstrate that the price of food has very little to do with the wages paid to food workers.

— Canadian Food and Allied Workers, Winnipeg Man.

Labour productivity in manufacturing rose 4.8 per cent in 1977, after all inflationary factors have been subtracted. This means, that just to stay even and get their share of increased productivity, workers should have received a wage increase of 9.5 per cent (to account for inflation) plus 4.8 per cent (to account for productivity) for a total of 14.3 percent wage increase. In fact, they have received only half of this.

— Alberta Federation of Labour.

Canadian food workers today earn on average, about seven per cent to ten per cent less than workers in manufacturing as a whole.

— Canadian Food and Allied Workers, Toronto, Ont.

In its inquiry, the Commission found that some working people were reluctant to take their energies away from immediate survival issues, such as employment, in order to participate in a long-term study like this. Others did not want to speak up for fear of losing their jobs. However, a variety of people did come forward: workers on farms or in restaurants, hotels, cafeterias and processing plants, as well as researchers and organizers concerned with labour questions. It is time to look at their testimony.

> I'm a crab killer. . . . On the average we handle sixteen thousand pounds a day. . . . It's done in a cool room and we are covered from head to toe in oil skins because the crab guts fly back at you. The way the machine works, is there are rollers that spin round and round and you take the caps off the body of the crab and brush the guts off and all the insides fly back at you.

Regina Walsh is a fish processor at Lismore Seafoods Ltd. in Nova Scotia. She makes $3.50 an hour and works lots of overtime besides her six-day work week. "We work forty-eight hours a week including Saturday. . . . You can reject overtime if you have a reasonable excuse . . . but you can only do it for so long."

Regina is thirty-three years old, has been

employed at the plant for two seasons and was named to an employee committee set up by the company to handle and negotiate employee demands.

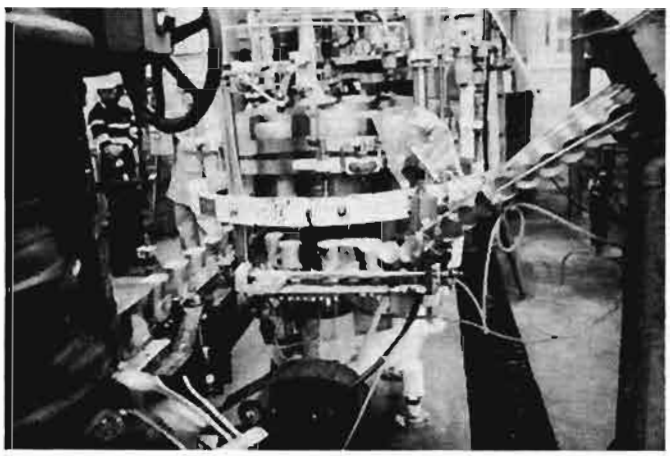
> We went over the whole agreement . . . section by section and the company rejected a lot of what we wanted to do. . . . The Committee has no power. . . . The agreement gives full authority to the company to do whatever it wants. . . . You're just beating your head against the wall. I resigned six weeks after the 1979 agreement was signed, when the futility registered.

The Committee asked for things such as toilet paper, repairs to the toilets, a place to eat meals, time to wash before breaks, and stools for the older women, along with better pay, statutory holidays, a formula for holiday pay and a more just seniority structure.

> So you work six days a week . . . eight hours with a lot of overtime plus two hours per day travelling time. My job consumes me. I can hardly wait to end in terms of getting back to my own personality. I have no time for anything anymore. . . . The evenings are relatively short because you have to get up so early in the morning and I just come home and prepare my clothes for the next day's work, make lunches, sit for one hour maybe two if I'm lucky then go to bed . . . and start all over again.

The Lismore fish plant is not a unionized shop but the workers there have a lot in common with those in many other establishments across the country. Regina's account of employees getting sick, for example, coincides almost word for word with a statement to the Commission from the Food and Allied Workers' Union:

> What happens if wage earners get sick? In many companies, if a production worker misses a day's work through illness, he loses a day's pay. If he misses a week, he misses a week's pay. This lack of any income protection is most common in the lowest-paid establishments. For many Canadians, getting a bad case of flu can be a minor financial disaster; breaking an arm can be a major one.



The price of food has very little to do with the wages paid to food workers.

One day at the Lismore fish plant the boiler broke down at the plant and workers had to wait several hours, without pay, until production resumed. The matter caused an uproar among the workers. The company's power to manipulate paid work-time in this way is not unusual.

Angelica Barra of Kitchener tells a similar story. She works in a cafeteria: "The policy that the company has to save themselves money is to hire workers under the occasional part-time policy. The people hired under this policy cannot work for over twenty-four hours per week. . . . They allow the

LIFE IN A FOOD PROCESSING PLANT

The Food Processing Plant differs from other industrial workplaces only in the products turned out. For the most part, the rules circumscribing the lives of industrial workers are identical: punch the time clock exactly on time when entering, do not question the judgement or directions of your supervisor; do not complain about anything unless you want to be labelled a troublemaker (if you're in a non-union plant, don't talk about a union or you're in big trouble); be suitably grateful that you have a job, regardless of the wages and conditions you must work under; don't get sick; stay on guard constantly against all the unnatural hazards that lurk around every corner; and when you're too old to work anymore, take your small pension of constantly diminishing value with a smile and just go away — you're no longer needed.

Although some workplaces are obviously better than others, that list of rules is hardly an exaggeration. Free enterprise is still considered the freedom to get the most work out of your fellow human beings while giving them the least possible compensation.

Based on sketchy industry reports, we estimate that almost one in ten food workers annually sustains an injury at work which results in lost time. The amount of lost time due to occupationally-induced illness or disease is impossible to calculate.

A common health hazard in the food industry is prolonged exposure to cold. And yet the common effects that you would expect to see on people who work in cold, often drafty, rooms all year round — rheumatism, aggravated arthritis and greater vulnerability to respiratory illnesses — these disabilities are not recognized by provincial compensation boards as being occupationally related to cold working environments. So if it hurts too much to work one day, it's time to start worrying. Because if it doesn't get better, you may be out of a job; and out of luck.

— Canadian Food and Allied Workers, Toronto, Ont.

worker to work overtime but any overtime worked is kept by the company for a slack time or time off.... They give you time off instead.... They don't seem to realize that a worker needs money for living and not free hours."

Nine out of ten workers at the Lismore plant are women. Most of them are married, with children. The Food and Allied Workers' Union raises the issue of second incomes:

> Anyone who thinks that married family women work in poultry plants, meat-packing plants, canning factories or fish processing plants for personal fulfillment or for a few superfluous dollars, or because they don't have anything better to do with their time, hasn't given the matter much thought. Most women work because they must work. But even if they were not working out of absolute necessity, this would be, in our opinion, completely irrelevant to the question of how they should be treated in the workplace. A job is a job. Work is work. Performance is performance. A worker's wages, working conditions, opportunities for advancement and income protection should be completely separated from their nationality, colour, age, sex, and other irrelevant factors.... Many employers still regard women as a cheap, easily manipulated and readily expendable source of labour.

At the Lismore plant, the company is exploiting the workers' labour, says Regina. The value added by their labour does not go back to the workers. Regina told the Commission that at the end of the fish season, the workers have no alternative but to apply for Unemployment Insurance. Poor? Yes, but they don't show on Canada's welfare rolls. Mary Potrobanko tabled *One Child One Chance*, by the National Council of Welfare, at the hearing in Edmonton. It says:

> Only about 1.3 million Canadians (most of them elderly, disabled, or women with small children) received anything from the federal-provincial needs-tested programs that make up our welfare system. Put another way, for every poor person getting welfare, there were another three poor people who were not receiving social assistance.
>
> Sixty-three per cent of Canada's poor live in families headed by a man or woman who is working. These are the working poor, often with more than one wage earner in the house, working but still poor.

We think of Canada as a wealthy country; and, for

Cafeteria workers at St. Paul's Hospital, Saskatoon.

WAITING FOR A TIP

Many of the working conditions and employer practices in the food service industry are deplorable and unjust.... Restaurants, as workplaces, are a different world from what the customer sees.

Some customers rate the service they receive in restaurants and tip accordingly; others tip regardless. They share a common misconception: that the tip they leave belongs entirely to the waiter/waitress who served them. Tips often directly subsidize the wages of other employees, including members of the management. Employers cite tipping, to lobby for a lower minimum wage in Ontario. However, when a tipped worker looks for protection from the Employment Standards Act, or benefits from the Unemployment Insurance Commission, he/she will find that tips are not included.

We are not going to deny that waiters in certain restaurants make a decent income. There are restaurants where waiters make as much as bus drivers, even construction workers. However, it would be a lie to talk about "waiters and waitresses" in this context.... Virtually no women are hired for these positions. The Ontario Human Rights Commission, which has looked into the situation, calls it "an apparent imbalance between the sexes in the hotel industry."

The restaurant and hotel industry is the largest single employer of women in this province; it employs large numbers of immigrants and young people. These groups comprise the sector in the labour force that has always been paid the lowest wages, has the lowest rate of unionization, and a corresponding lack of political power.

It is not surprising that the employers in the field are a confident lot, and are very successful in getting government to meet their demands. The most important of these demands is the lower minimum wage for tipped employees.... The $2.50 minimum wage for waitresses and waiters was an employer victory in 1976, and to have frozen that wage for almost three years, while the cost of living has escalated over twenty-five per cent, represents quite an achievement for them.

— Canadian Food and
Allied Services Union, Toronto, Ont.

Serving is seen as "women's work", work that comes

"naturally" to us. Women look after the needs and comforts of husbands, children, friends, and ourselves, both at home — for free — and in female job ghettoes — service, office, sales, daycare, and nursing jobs — for low wages. There are vast numbers of women, whose only alternative is wagelessness in the home and who are, therefore, always ready to take jobs at the lowest end of the pay scale. For example, at Smitty's Restaurant in Vancouver in 1973, management's response to an attempted union drive was to fire all the waitresses. They were able to restaff their restaurants the same day, at the same low wages.

— Waitresses Action Committee, Toronto, Ont.

Men customers in the steakhouse/tavern where I worked were always trying to grab me, or run their fingers up and down the buttons on my uniform, or smell the phoney rose I was required to wear in my cleavage. It was hard to tell them to stop, because I had to be nice as I depended on tips. How could I complain to my boss when he was the one who looked me up and down when he hired me and said: "Remember, the customer is always right!"

— Ellen Agger, Toronto, Ont.

most Canadians it is. However, conservative estimates say that at least one out of every five Canadians lives in poverty; two-thirds of those people (or about thirteen per cent of Canadians) are working poor.

Working at Fraser Valley Frosted Foods, a food freezing plant, Chilliwack, B.C.

A JAMAICAN CASE-STUDY

The majority of women work in order to feed their children. Roughly one-third of all women are sole providers for their household and the average Jamaican woman has four or five children. This means paying rent, buying food, buying school uniforms, books, and providing bus fare with $30 or less per week. . . .

About one-fifth of the children under four years, that is approximately fifty thousand, are significantly underweight. Three per cent of children in their second year of life are so severely malnourished that they require urgent treatment, having already suffered probably irreversible mental and physical retardation. . . .

The ruling People's National Party, the government in Jamaica, has taken great strides to better the lot of the Jamaican working people . . . in the area of the economy, agriculture, housing, education, women, youth and labour. And yet the Jamaican people are still suffering grave hardships: further unemployment, high prices and farmers are without land. The present plight of the Jamaican people is a result of the conditions laid on the government by the International Monetary Fund. Under the IMF agreement, the cost of living has gone up by forty-five per cent. The IMF demanded that the government subsidies on basic foods be decreased, that wages be frozen, that price controls be removed (some items have gone up as much as eighty per cent this year alone). The dollar is devalued by 1.5 per cent every month to meet the demand of the overall reduction of 37.33 per cent. A twenty per cent profit on investment is assured for local and international capital investment. A consumption tax has been increased from ten per cent to 27.5 per cent. The production level has decreased and social programs have been drastically cut back.

The conditions have benefitted only the local and international investors and have left the Jamaican people to suffer and starve.

— Joy Marie Booth, an organizer of women in Jamaica and guest of CUSO at the hearings in Peterborough, Ont.

How does this affect their families, their lives? A group of mothers at the Norwood Community Centre in Edmonton discussed this question. "They hold our wages down, and our disposable income dwindles." After work, the mothers said, neither parent has time to do the household chores. Consumption of processed convenience foods goes up. Despite the fact that these processed foods don't cost as much for the manufacturers to produce, they continue to be more expensive.

For the poor, the result of all this is a vicious cycle — and persistent health and social problems. "The children are dropping out of school. They can't keep up with their school work. I'm sure a lot of it is because of nutrition. It's not that they're born stupid. It's nutrition. I mean you can see them with bow

legs, rickets, the whole bit." (Phil Olsen, grocer, Annapolis Co., N.S.)

People pointed out that malnutrition can lead to more than dropping out of school. It can lead to "criminal acts" and often the wrong conclusions are drawn. Claire Culhane, of the Prisoners' Rights Group in Vancouver, submitted a brief that asked:

> Would we rather spend 'x' times $20,000 on research and treatment for children who demonstrate 'strange, aggressive and hostile behaviour'? Or, at a later date, would we rather spend $20,000 per year per prisoner to maintain each person whose food allergies, malnutrition and mind-warping behaviour led to anti-social and criminal acts?

Lorna McCarville of the Schizophrenic Association in Victoria, B.C., drew a similar conclusion: "It makes me angry every time I go into a courtroom to see the absolute blithering nonsense that we're paying for. . . . The case worker comes into court with a psychological evaluation. A medical evaluation is not given. Yet many juveniles are diabetic or pre-diabetic."

THE TV DINNER

Canadian society is epitomized in the TV dinner. Let's think about it:

— It stresses the individual — a meal for me; it consists of processed food, made in a factory; what goes into it is decided by someone other than the eater;

— It is advertised, erroneously I believe, as nutritious and good tasting;

— It is advertised as necessary to people "on the run", leading a busy life;

— It usually contains meat and potatoes.

We've given up control of our lives, been convinced of false rewards and live in a highly individualistic and busy manner.

— Angela Pritchard, 519 Co-op, Toronto, Ont.

Earlene Horne came to Canada as a guest of the People's Food Commission from the Caribbean Island of St. Vincent, where she is a member of the ARWEE collective. Here she speaks to a living-room meeting in Edgley, Sask.

* * * * *

People have to eat; and to eat they have to work. We cannot separate the demands of the food system from the demands of the labour market; and these demands are harsh on many Canadians. The Commission's survey of workers in the food industry shows, then, that those workers are not benefitting from the rising cost of food any more than are farmers, fishermen or consumers. The system has developed its own set of rules, or "logic", which guides its operation. In order to better understand the problems in Canadian food production, and some of the possible solutions, it is necessary first to determine just what this "logic" means.

Meadow Lake, Sask. hearing.

2 Cultivating Chaos: The Trends

A GENERATION ago, many people owned small parcels of land. Since then the tendency has been towards fewer and fewer people holding larger and larger pieces of property. Not only can this development be seen in rural areas, where there are fewer, larger farms all the time, but also, in a different way, in urban areas where large supermarkets are driving out the small grocers.

This move towards increasing concentration of ownership and control in the food system is one trend that was revealed clearly by the evidence presented to the Food Commission, as we've seen in Chapter One. It's one of the most important trends but, as the evidence indicates, there are several others:

- The number of people earning a living from producing, processing and handling food is going down.
- People are increasingly being caught in a squeeze between cost and income. Farmers and fishermen are finding that expenditures for equipment and materials are going up far more rapidly than the prices they can get for their produce. Increased interest rates are also a burden. Small businesses cannot keep ahead of their costs. Wages and salaries are, for the most part, not rising as rapidly as the cost of living.
- As a nation, Canadians are becoming more dependent on imported food, and almost all regions are becoming more dependent on food brought in from other regions. And when people in local areas stop producing food to be used in those areas, they also stop making decisions about the production, processing, price and quality of the food. Food is shipped to a central point, and shipped back out from there. Decisions are also made in that central spot, be it Toronto, Vancouver, or Chicago.

• Many of these trends are encouraged in the name of greater efficiency, and many people believe this claim is true. In fact, when all the costs, including health, lost employment, damage to the soil, pollution, increased transportation of goods and the tax burden, are taken into account, the food system is losing in efficiency.

• The government and its surrounding institutions (such as the law, hospitals, civil service) tend to follow policies that support all of these trends.

As a way of illustrating these trends, we have chosen case studies on the tomato industry, the Thunder Bay region and wheat. These examples not only reveal how the trends work in specific cases, but also how they interact with each other.

The Decline of the Tomato Industry

SOURCES

Case study based on briefs by Brian Latham, Ottawa hearing; Ed Geerheart, Mrs. Charles Bickford, and Joe Mori, Kamloops hearing; and *The Tomato Papers*, presented to the Guelph hearing by the Ontario Public Interest Research Group.

There was a time when Canada was almost self-sufficient in tomatoes. But between 1930 and 1975, tomato production in British Columbia, for instance, dropped from 58.6 million pounds to 9.7 million pounds. In Ontario in the last twenty-five years, sixty-five hundred growers have gone out of

Harvesting tomatoes: caught in the grip of the large processing companies.

LIVIN' ON A FARM

It was eighty years ago today
that my folks came to Canada,
Travelled in steerage on a steamer across the sea.
Oh, they took a train from Montreal
Stayed up three days and nights and all,
All they owned in this world was on their knees.

Chorus

We were livin' in the country: We were livin' on a farm.
We were livin' in the country: Didn't do no harm.
But one by one the kids grew up and set out on their own,
and we'll always call that little place our home.

They came out to Saskatchewan,
they settled up near Lanagan,
Built up their sod house, some place to see!
Oh, they farmed their quarter section good,
And it gave them enough to have some food.
And I was the last of six kids in the family.

Chorus

Oh the hours were long and the days were short,
But we got a house with a lot of work,
And the neighbours came thirty miles to raise the barn.
Oh, the weather was good and the crops were fine,
and I needed it so I went to school,
And that old wood stove she kept the one-room shack real warm.
Then in '34 I was 25
and it felt great to be alive,
Even with the wind and the dust and the salt cod stews,
I got married, had kids and went away to war,
But I don't recall what I went there for
The place around here's been stripped of all the folks I knew.

Chorus

And now they're doin' their very best to take away everything we own,
And those people didn't move away, they were thrown.
Most folks didn't know when they first came
How the Indians were kicked off the plains.
We're learning fast, they're doing it to us today.
Oh they've changed the names but we got the same pity
And our reservation, it's called the city.
Once you're there how do you get away,
And I'm in debt up to my neck
And it's getting worse and you gotta expect
There's gonna be no one livin' here after us.
Well I guess it'll please all the Ottawa boys
And I hope to hell that they enjoy
A countryside where there's no one to raise a fuss.

Chorus

We'll be livin' in the city,
We'll be livin' in the town,
And livin' in the city,
Can get you down.
But the corporate boys don't give a damn
As long as you've got a dime.
I guess you've heard enough of this,
And I'm not used to crime but,

Chorus

— by Geoffrey Ursell, sung by Bob Carty in Toronto.

business and nine thousand acres of tomato land have turned to other uses. By 1965, Canada was importing 33 million pounds of canned tomatoes alone. By 1976, 96 million pounds were coming into the country.

What happened to the Canadian tomato industry? There were several briefs presented to the Commission telling us the story — a story about an industry once spread out all over the country, now gathered into the hands of a few giant corporations. The same pattern can be seen at the different levels of the industry — retailing, processing and growing.

Most Canadians buy their tomatoes at the big chain-stores, which now control eighty per cent of the retail food market. Even independent grocers must buy from wholesalers who are owned by the large chains. Tomato processors must sell to one of these chain-stores or not sell at all. Usually the chains stock only one or two of the nationally advertised labels along with their own line. Take, for instance, the Loblaws chain, owned by the Weston company. In a Loblaws store, you can get Del Monte stewed tomatoes or Loblaws' own label. If you want canned whole tomatoes, you can choose from Aylmer (Del Monte), Loblaws, or Enzio (also owned by Weston). The smaller independent processors survive (those that do survive) by marketing tomatoes under the chain-store labels.

The chains are able to buy outside of Canada, to get the cheapest produce available. They shop in countries such as Taiwan where the labour force, virtually held captive by industry, is paid token wages and can produce tomatoes more cheaply than its Canadian counterpart. The supermarkets take advantage of this by importing without changing their price to the consumer. The difference is taken in profit. This cheap competition forces Canadian canners to lower their price — often to a level below the cost of production.

Small processors, facing pressure from cheap imports, chain-owned processors and the dominance of a few nationally-advertised brands, are going out of business at a rapid rate. In the 1960s well over one hundred companies processed tomatoes in Canada. Most were Canadian-owned. Now there are less than fifty. Of those, four companies have the lion's share of the tomato market: H.J. Heinz, Campbell Soup, Canadian Canners (owned by Del Monte), all American-owned companies; and Libby, McNeill and Libby, a subsidiary of Nestlé S.A. of Switzerland. The fifth largest tomato processor in Canada is Hunt-Wesson, owned by the huge U.S. conglomerate, Norton Simon, and the dominant firm in tomato sauce and paste.

Costs are controlled by keeping down wages, which means hiring women and children, exploiting imported workers, shutting out unions or employing part-time and seasonal workers.

In 1936, American-owned companies controlled ten to fifteen per cent of the Canadian market in fruits and vegetables. By the early seventies they controlled over sixty-five per cent. With huge advertising budgets, financial backing from parent companies and access to cheaper foreign produce, these companies have no difficulty gaining advantage over Canadian-owned processors. They buy out Canadian plants or force them to shut down.

IT HAPPENS TO FISHERMEN TOO

Rick Williams has spent many years working with fishermen in the Atlantic region, helping them organize. Here is a summary of what he told the Commission:

Off the coast of the Atlantic provinces, three kinds of fishermen seek the lobster and the "groundfish" (the haddock, halibut and cod which feed near the bottom).

The "offshore" boats are over sixty-five feet, usually company-owned, stay out for about ten days, fish twelve months a year. They trawl with nets or drag the bottom. About thirty-five hundred men work these boats in the Atlantic region; and they account for about thirty-five per cent of the catch.

The "nearshore" boats are fifty to sixty-five feet, usually owner-operated, stay out for one to seven days, and fish about ten months of the year. They lobster in season and fish groundfish the rest of the time; for these, some use nets and some long lines. About six or seven thousand men work these boats, and account for about fifteen per cent of the catch.

The "inshore" boats are still the backbone of the fishing industry in the Atlantic waters. These are boats under fifty feet, almost always owner-operated. They go out for the day, and fish one-quarter to one-third of the days of the year; most of their income is from lobstering in season; and almost always long-line for other species. There are about twenty-eight thousand inshore fishermen, and they account for half the catch in Atlantic Canada. This information is from the Minister of Fisheries, Hon. Romeo Leblanc. He added that the nearshore and inshore fishermen have been earning an average of $9,000 to $12,000 a year in recent years.

The fish are bought by a few firms owned by the fish merchant families, the Nickersons, the Smiths, the Connors, the Morrows, the Melansons. Because the market is so tightly controlled by these few firms, small fishermen — like small farmers — are caught in a cost-price squeeze and end up with poverty wages.

However, there has not been the same wiping out of small fishermen as there has been among farmers. The reason? The large trawlers, so "efficient" at catching large quantities of fish in their nets, do not yield high-quality fish, since many species are caught together, they get broken, and they die too early. What they catch is used for dog food, and for frozen blocks used in prisons, hospitals and military camps. The fish merchants must rely on the labour-intensive inshore fishermen for high-quality fish.

What makes it possible for these men to stay fishing? They love it, despite the hardships they endure. They live in communities where people have pulled together, worked together, and saved each others' lives for generations. The fish merchants are able to exploit this deep feeling that fishing people have for their life, and benefit from their labours. Fishermen are able to survive partly because their wives work, and partly because the Unemployment Insurance Act allows them to collect benefits in the off season.

Some fishermen argue that these UIC payments are really a subsidy to the fish merchants, who are the ones benefitting from the large number of inshore fishermen staying in the trade.

In the past few years, the inshore fishermen throughout New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia have begun to organize themselves in the Maritime Fishermen's Union. They have faced many difficulties, including opposition from the provincial and federal governments, but are determined to protect their fish stock from destruction by the large trawlers, and to get a fair return for their labour.

Because of the pressure on smaller, independent canners, the number of workers in the industry is kept down and the rate of pay remains at minimum wage. When the plants close down, many employees lose their jobs. Conditions for those left working in the large foreign-owned canneries are not much better. The larger companies are always involved in a process of trying to cut costs, and most of their costs are not flexible. They buy cans from the two large, foreign-owned companies, Continental Can and American Can, which monopolize the industry. The price charged for cans is not open to negotiation. Likewise, oil, electricity, finance capital and machinery come from industries controlled by fewer than four large companies. Here, prices are also fixed.

One way to control costs is to keep wages down. This means hiring women and youth who often cannot leave to look for jobs elsewhere. Or it means keeping the unions out, putting workers in competition with one another, firing anyone who speaks out about wages and working conditions, and hiring as many part-time and seasonal workers as possible. Wage levels in the tomato industry over the period from 1976 to 1978 went up at only half the rate of inflation.

Another way is to cut down the labour force by mechanization. An example is the use of mechanical peeling. Tomatoes in mechanized plants are dipped in lye and then shaken around to flail off the skin — a task previously done by hand.

The large, multinational canners further cut costs by buying out related industries. They can thus control their own trucking, wholesaling, packaging, label printing, growing and storage. It means they can also take profit at each of these stages.

The report of the federal government Task Force on the Processed Fruit and Vegetable Industry, released in July 1978, didn't help matters. The report recommended that the number of firms involved in processing be reduced. It recommended that small and medium-sized plants be closed down. It suggested that government regulation of canners, and government assistance to communities hard hit by plant closures, both be reduced. According to the Task Force members, Canada should only grow what it can produce more cheaply than other countries — meaning potatoes, apples, blueberries and sweet corn — and import all other fruits and vegetables, tomatoes included. The report states that foreign control will encourage the development of Canada's fruit and vegetable processing industry. In fact, following this course means that Canada must import more and more tomatoes from the United States through the hands of four large foreign-controlled companies.

What effect do these trends in retailing and processing have on the Canadians who grow tomatoes? They are going out of business faster than canneries. Some of those who have stopped growing tomatoes have switched to other crops, others have simply disappeared. Farmers are caught, like the small processors, in a squeeze between high costs and low prices for their product. Farming may still be a good business, but it's one that fewer and fewer people can practise.

Increased mechanization — another way of cutting costs by reducing the need for labour.

The farmers who still grow tomatoes do so under contract to one of the processing firms. The contract, signed before the crop is planted, details the number of acres to be planted with each variety, the type and frequency of pesticide and fungicide to be used, the quantities of tomatoes to be delivered, the date of delivery and the price. In other words, processing companies take complete control over tomato production, while the farmers take the risks: of failure, of potential labour problems, of rising costs of energy, land, fertilizer and pesticides. Companies have the additional insurance factors of growing some crop tomatoes of their own and of reserving the right to import. To be on the safe side, they usually underestimate the amount of produce they will need from Canadian growers in order to be free to seek less expensive tomatoes abroad.

Like the small canners who have to buy their fuel, cans and machinery from a few companies that control the market, farmers must go to these same corporate families to buy machinery and chemicals. They have no control over the increasing share of their income demanded by suppliers.

A principal cost item for farmers is land. Good land, generally in short supply, has rapidly increased in price through speculation. Land that changed hands five years ago for $75 an acre is selling now for $300 or $400.

It is easier for processors to deal with a few large farmers than with many small ones, so their contracts demand large acreage. Similarly, the federal

LAND FOR SALE

In the five year period from 1966 to 1971, over 212,000 acres were converted from rural to urban land use. . . . Of this, over half was formerly productive crop land, improved pasture, orchards or horticulture — a total of 114,268 acres. A further 30,000 acres of productive forest were built upon, along with 47,000 acres of unimproved pasture.

— Ministry of the Environment, tabled in Toronto, Ont.

What price land? The native people of Canada recognized in their lifestyle that land is priceless. It yielded its increase and supported its people. They existed on the results of their labour, not by charging rent or interest on something God-given.

We have attempted to change all that. The Canadian dream has been for some time to amass enough money by whatever means society will accept, to eventually live off the interest at the expense of others trying to get into the same situation. At the risk of sounding like an unwashed hippie or a red-eyed communist, I must say that the system is wrong. At least our sense of values is wrong.

Land is priceless. Over the generations that have established market value for land, we should now realize that the real beneficiaries of land as a marketable commodity are not those who hold title to it, but those who collect interest on the money advanced to finance its purchase.

We have examples in different parts of the world of alternatives to ownership of land. In Holland the polders, land reclaimed from the sea at an expense that prohibited individual ownership, have long been farmed based on a family lease arrangement between the farmers and the Dutch government. I believe this is what priceless means.

— Robert King, farmer, London, Ont.

government supports farm growth through its Farm Enlargement and Consolidation program. By 1976, the average acreage planted in tomatoes was 14.5, with plantings of 50 and 100 acres not uncommon.

Buying more land, of course, increases debt. Farmers, as a result, are caught in a vicious circle. To pay off their debts, they must first of all stay in business, and to stay in business they must get further into debt. Farmers are having to borrow even to survive, let alone expand. The debt load they carry is now more than twice what it was in 1970. The interest on the loans is yet another cost, and a rising one.

PRESSURE ON POTATO FARMERS

I know farmers that had to steal their own potatoes to put groceries on the table for their children. The reason one farmer had to steal them is that the banks demanded that he have a contract with McCain's before they'd give him any loans. He was in debt to McCain's, he got his fertilizer from McCain's, his machinery from McCain's, chemicals from McCain's.... McCain's take out what you owe them first.... Over and above that, the banks demanded payment. Your cheques come from one place to you and the bank, so you get what the bank is willing to give you....

This particular farmer, after three years of being tied up financially, had to steal his own potatoes, peddle them on the North Shore to buy groceries for his family. They found out he was doing that and put a padlock on his door.

— Darrell McLaughlin, potato farmer, Aroostook, N.B.

Mrs. Simpkins, market gardener, sells her produce at the Farmers' Market in Saskatoon.

Farmers caught in this situation have to compensate by growing more produce and by trying to cut costs. The pressure to produce means that land cannot be left fallow or built up by slow organic methods. Overuse of the soil is countered by heavy use of artificial fertilizers. This damages the soil even more and again increases the total cost of production.

Here again for farmers, as for processors, one of the few flexible costs is labour. On farms, wages are low, housing for pickers is very poor, and there are no health standards to protect field workers from accident, injury or exposure to toxic chemicals. The Labour Relations Act prohibits organization of farm workers. They are also exempt from workers' safety and compensation legislation. Increasingly, Canadians will not do the work, and the federal government eases the situation by bringing in crop pickers from the West Indies. Although studies have shown that the West Indians do not pick as quickly as Canadians, who are more used to the work, farmers see them as a more "reliable" labour force. They simply cannot go anywhere until the work is done; and as soon as it is done they are returned home. Since they face a situation of desperate poverty and unemployment in their home countries, they are forced here to put up with conditions which Canadians avoid.

Even though labour cost is kept as low as possible, wages are still the single greatest expense for tomato farmers. And again like the processors, farmers are replacing workers with machines. Ten per cent of the Canadian crop is now taken in by machine. The larger companies, such as Heinz, have twenty-five per cent of their contracts machine-harvested.

These trends in the tomato industry not only affect the lives of the people who work in it; they also affect the quality of the tomato itself. Much research goes into the tomatoes — more than into any other horticultural crop in Ontario. And this research and selective breeding is designed not to give the tomato more nutritional quality and better flavour, but to make it more suitable for mechanical harvesting, for shipping long distances and for ripening in the dark. The result of these choices has been a hard, thick-skinned tomato, low in vitamins C, A, D and B, the main contributions of the tomato to our diet.

The process of shipping tomatoes long distances, when they are imported, further deteriorates their nutritional quality. They are picked green and ripened by application of ethylene gas. Tomatoes don't see the sun, a major factor in developing their nutrients. Even tomatoes earmarked for processing

are sprayed with ethrel or ethylene to stop their growth and hasten their reddening. The fact that this disrupts the natural balance of acids and sugars, which gives the tomato its nutritional value and taste, appears to be of no concern to the processors. They choose the tomato for its uniformity of size, colour and shape, not for its nutritional or taste value.

During the processing, nutrients are destroyed even more by the application of heat. Then there are the additives — primarily colouring, salt and sugar — which can be detrimental to health. Often half of the contents of a bottle of ketchup or a can of tomato sauce is sugar.

Besides these deliberate additives, there are the unintentional ones, the residues from the pesticides and fungicides sprayed on the growing tomato. These chemicals are poorly tested for toxicity in the first place, and never tested for effect in the long term or in combination with other chemicals. Even when a chemical is proven dangerous, it is almost impossible to have it withdrawn from the market. A case in point is ethylenebisdithiocarbamate (EBDC) fungicides, used routinely on tomatoes. A researcher in the federal Department of National Health and Welfare discovered that EBDC forms a toxic chemical called ethylenethiouria (ETU) when cooked. ETU is linked with liver and thyroid cancer. The chemical industry claims that ETU is a secondary product and therefore not a company's responsibility, and these fungicides continue to be used in great quantities on our tomatoes. Both U.S. and Canadian government authorities refuse to remove the product because they say there is no replacement. ETU is just one example of a recurring story in the testing of agricultural chemicals. For many others no data are available except those provided by the company which developed the product.

Much of the change in the tomato industry has come about under the banner of efficiency. Farmers are producing twice what they used to on the same piece of land, and the incomes of a few of them are going up. Large processors are growing, expanding and increasing their profits. Large retailers can make the same claim. But if all the costs are taken into account, the tomato industry does not look so good. Large numbers of people have lost their small businesses, their farms and their jobs. The quality of the soil is rapidly declining and agricultural land is going into other uses. Tons of chemicals and topsoil are running into our rivers and lakes, and some of the chemicals are highly toxic. The health of the general public is damaged by the lack of nutrients in the tomatoes and the presence of additives and chemical residues. The cost of a tomato goes up, but the share going to primary producers, workers and small-plant owners goes down. Increasing proportions of the earnings in the industry are leaving the country altogether. For most of us the tomato industry is not only becoming less efficient, it is threatening our present ability to feed ourselves.

The Decline of a Local Food Economy

SOURCES

Case study based on briefs by Ursula Donovan, Lorry Rydholm, Joe Vanderweiss and Vince Lakshani, Thunder Bay hearing.

People in the rest of Canada often picture the Thunder Bay area as nothing but rock and trees. "We're always told that we couldn't be self-sufficient and support ourselves. It's too cold, the growing season is too short, etcetera," one presenter said in her submission. However, during the hearings in Thunder Bay a different picture emerged, of a region that was at one time capable of enough agriculture to satisfy almost all its own food needs. In fact, thirty or forty years ago the Thunder Bay area was close to being self-sufficient in food production. Since then there has been a persistent decline, to the point where now Thunder Bay is almost completely dependent on food brought in from Winnipeg and Toronto. What little food is produced in Thunder Bay is now shipped out to other places. There are hundreds of acres of land lying fallow in the area — land going to waste.

Joe Vanderweiss, a vegetable grower, told us that thirty years ago the whole area was supplied with vegetables grown around the small towns near Thunder Bay. At one time the Rainy River area nearby not only shipped vegetables to Thunder Bay, but also supplied the Minneapolis region. The Dorion area used to ship select potatoes and strawberries to the New York market. But in 1922 a change in the trade arrangements between Canada and the United States cut off the American market. Later, in the 1940s, an employee of the federal Department of Agriculture, who came to judge at the Thunder Bay exhibition, recommended that a canning plant be established in the region for select quality vegetables. He had never seen better. A submission in Thunder Bay from Ursula Donovan explained that the cold nights in Thunder Bay actually help crop growth: the vegetables grow more slowly and as a result become tender and juicy. A sign which stood for years by the Exhibition grounds in the city said, "Eat Thunder Bay produce". "Where is that sign now?" Ursula Donovan asked. "Where is the produce?"

DEATH OF A RURAL VILLAGE

The village I lived in was located at the place where two dirt roads crossed; it consisted of approximately fifty buildings, including a community centre/arena built and financed totally by the local people, a church, a general store and post office, a slaughter-house and a large schoolhouse-turned-cottage. At one time it had been a centre for cheese and brick-making and had even had its own bank. Now it housed mainly retired farmers, hired hands, and the occasional person who filled a local need. Community spirit was high, life was more active than any place I'd ever lived before, and people were generally happy with life, though always a bit uneasy about how long farming would be possible.

The village store also demonstrated some of the problems with the model of development we were following, but this time from the side of the food delivery system. At first I found it strange that most of the farm families got what food they didn't grow at the village store, which was really a combination grocery, drugstore, and hardware store in a space as big as a typical school classroom. When I did some comparison shopping, I discovered that the prices were at least competitive and often cheaper than the prices in the markets in the town sixteen kilometres away.

The owner told me that he didn't have the overhead costs of advertising, parking spaces, heat and light bills, damage, and shoplifting. He also avoided products that really weren't different; that meant he didn't carry as many brands, but he had as much variety as a supermarket would. He knew he could make extra money by exploiting people's belief that small neighbourhood stores had to be more expensive than the chain stores, but he said he couldn't do that because he was in the community to meet people's basic food needs, not to get rich.

The major problem he faced was with the inability of the distribution system (in this case, National Grocers, part of the Weston organization) to deliver satisfactorily in the less populous and less lucrative markets. For instance, when several people asked if they could get plain yogurt, they were told it wouldn't be worth bringing it out to them because they were at the end of the run and there weren't many of them.

Eventually, when the store changed hands and a less aggressive owner took over, the quality of the food delivered also dropped. Bread was delivered four days past the freshness date, sometimes with mold covering it. Rotten cabbage, soft peppers, and slimy green onions were also dropped off until people gradually sensed that the food system was working less and less effectively.

Meanwhile, prices had begun to rise above those of the same products in suburban stores near Toronto.

There were also signs of underdevelopment as it affected the social fabric of the village we lived in. A woman who had lived all her life in the area told me that when she was a girl everyone played one or more instruments and every village had a band. But then they heard about the hired bands from the city, and it became a sign of prestige to invite a band in for a community dance. When that became too expensive, the people discovered that almost everyone had lost the ability to play the fiddles, bones, guitars, and pianos that were so important to rural life. This woman was afraid they were losing the ability to entertain themselves and were losing touch with their ruralness simply because at one time rural culture hadn't looked quite as exciting and sophisticated as urban culture.

In the Third World countries, we identify that trend as part of the marginalization process that makes one way of life valuable and others worthless. Here we often label it "progress" or keeping up with the times. To me it is a warning signal that the social fabric in agricultural communities is under strain from a model of development that has economic as well as social effects.

— Bonnie Greene, Toronto, Ont.

The idea of establishing a canning plant in Thunder Bay almost became a reality. In 1942, a producer co-op proposed building a large vegetable canning and freezing plant, along with an indoor farmers' market and a fish-processing plant. The federal Department of Agriculture offered to pay fifty per cent of the cost and the provincial government offered to cover twenty-five per cent. The plans were drawn, the land assembled, and when the Co-op began to sell shares, it had a good response. But the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce, perhaps thinking of the competition that the plant would give to its members' businesses, began a campaign to stop the plan. It sent out letters to members asking them not to do business with the Co-op. (The Co-op, itself a member of the Chamber of Commerce, was accidentally sent one of the letters.) It hired people to list and photograph people who shopped at the Co-op and publicly accused them of communism. It visited local farmers to convince them that the project was communist and would rob them of their independence. The Co-op could no longer get farmers to sign as shareholders or members. At that point the whole project was interrupted by the war effort and when the Co-op tried again afterwards, the federal and provincial funding offers were withdrawn.

Ursula Donovan told some other stories about the loss of self-sufficiency in the region. For instance, the native people in the Dorion area were once completely self-sufficient. They lived by growing blueberries, fishing and operating a canoe-building factory. Every day during the blueberry season, one train-car of berries would leave the area for Toronto, another for Winnipeg. The canoe plant was eventually bought out and closed down by the Peterborough Canoe Company, which wanted to avoid the competition. The same fate befell a co-operative cheese plant near Thunder Bay at Stanley, Ontario. Kraft bought the cheese factory in 1944 and closed it down. Just a few years ago, a co-operative cannery and meat-packing plant was bought out by Canada Packers. Only one dairy in Thunder Bay is still locally owned. (The others were

bought by Burns Foods of Calgary, and Beatrice Foods of Chicago.) Eggs are packed in local cartons, but they come from Winnipeg. A local dairy farmer, Lorry Rydholm, who told us that he is about to close down himself, pointed out that in 1974 there were 130 dairy farmers in the area; now there are under 100.

An independent grocer, Vince Lakshani, told us the story of the food wholesalers in Thunder Bay. There are two wholesale companies that are not controlled by any of the major supermarket chains. However, the big chains have now moved into the town and are undercutting the independent companies by lowering prices to the point where the independents can't compete. One of these businesses is now considering closing. Vince has experienced this kind of thing in other cities: once the chain wholesalers have driven out the independent wholesalers, they raise their prices by twenty per cent and refuse discounts to the independent retailers. The independent grocers are forced to close and the supermarkets gain dominance over the region.

The city of Thunder Bay is moving towards total dependence for all its food supplies on a few large, multinational companies. And yet, as past history shows, the region could be almost completely self-sufficient. As Joe Vanderweiss said to the hearing, "We don't need Winnipeg or Toronto. We could do it ourselves."

Thunder Bay is not alone in this: similar cases could be found across the country. In a letter to the inquiry, Jack Warnock, a commissioner in British Columbia, outlined a number of examples in that province:

> Smithers, a town up by Prince Rupert, used to be a major fruit and vegetable producer, and once provided Vancouver with most of its strawberries. None are grown there now. Ashcroft not only used to grow and pack tomatoes, but its potatoes used to be world famous. None of either vegetable is grown there now. There used to be a thousand Chinese market gardeners in the Salmon Arm-Armstrong area, and now there is one. Armstrong itself is known as the "Celery City", but you couldn't find a plant there now. Oliver is known as the "Cantaloupe City", but in the summer you probably couldn't find one in a backyard garden.

The Case of Wheat

When it comes to wheat producers in Canada, many of the same trends are at work. Wheat farmers have also suffered a cost-price squeeze. For example, the price of farm implements has gone up twenty-nine per cent from 1973 to 1977, while farm income during the same time rose by only fourteen per cent. The average price of wheat-growing land in

Saskatchewan has risen from $75 an acre in 1969 to $400 in 1979. This rise in the price of land, plus the rise in interest rates, means a crushing capital debt load for most farmers. Little wonder, then, that the number of farmers producing wheat continues to decline. The National Farmers Union told us that more than 28 thousand farmers have become "dispossessed" in Saskatchewan since 1961.

The inability of farmers to stay in farming does not stem from their incompetence. The brief of the National Farmers Union in Regina pointed out the outside pressures on farm land, the effect of which is eventually to force farmers out: "Inflationary pressures on land prices in recent years have been stimulated by investment money outside of agriculture. As a result, many farmers have been frustrated from enlarging their farm size, or young farmers have been unable to enter farming because speculative land prices have been unrelated to the ability of the land to repay itself from the production of food alone."

What a study of the history of wheat in Canada adds to our study of tomatoes is a sharper picture of the international food system, and a first look at the role of the state in the food system. Wheat can be stored for many years. It is a basic food, wanted by people all over the world. For this reason, the export of wheat — and wheat is Canada's largest export — is a major factor in Canada's Gross National Product. But wheat is grown on the prairies, at least a thousand miles from the ocean, so that its transportation has constantly been a problem for wheat producers. Submissions to the Commission told about the long struggle of Canadian farmers to gain control of the wheat they grow, and how their victory is again being threatened. The story of Canadian wheat provides a glimpse of where the trends in our food system are leading, unless some important changes are made.

Unlike the tomato producers, who have only recently faced a few large processors, wheat farmers have been up against the monopoly power of a few large buyers from the time they first began to grow produce for export from their areas. The railway would not accept grain straight from farmers; they had to sell it to the elevator company. Prices, set on

Harvesting on the Sandison Farm at Brandon, Manitoba, some time around the turn of the century.

IT'S NOT NEW

Calgary, 1916... Farmers in Alberta and elsewhere in Canada and the U.S. were organizing to confront their problems. They were not getting their fair share of the national income, despite rising wheat prices, for these were offset by the increasing cost of production. Land, machinery, and marketing were all costing more. The farmers rightly blamed the rising cost of land upon the existence of land monopolies and speculators. In Western Canada the chief culprits were the Hudson's Bay Company and the CPR, who along with foreign land speculators held vast acreages.

The railroads charged exorbitant rates for transporting farm produce and often failed to provide sufficient railroad cars for efficient delivery to market. The cost of farm implements in the prairie provinces was raised by discriminatory freight rates and by the existence of tariffs on imported and manufactured goods, which benefitted Eastern manufacturers. There was much criticism of the privately owned elevators, which were often inadequate in size, inefficient in management, and guilty of dishonest practices. The Winnipeg Grain Exchange was dominated by five grain companies who through speculation manipulated the wheat prices to the disadvantage of both farmer and consumer. And last but not least, was the farmer's dissatisfaction with the banking system. Farmers needed credit in order to buy machinery, land, livestock and for other capital needs. Many farmers were unable to get sufficient credit and many were heavily in debt to the banks because of high interest rates.

All these grievances led the farmers of Alberta (and elsewhere) to organize in order to set up their own co-operatives for buying, marketing and storing grain and other farm products. The power of their collective opinion was used in lobbying provincial and federal governments.

— from *William Irvine: The Life of a Prairie Radical* by Anthony Mardiros; a biographical book tabled in Edmonton, Alta.

the Winnipeg Grain Exchange, fluctuated wildly; basically, they were very low in the fall when the farmers wanted to sell. Often farmers received less for the wheat than it had cost them to produce it.

Starting in 1906, farmers organized their own co-operative grain-marketing companies to compete with private firms. In 1917, because of the war, the government set up a Board of Grain Supervisors to buy all wheat and sell it to other governments. The stable prices that ensued convinced many farmers that a "compulsory pool" was more effective than their earlier pool, which was really a voluntary co-op. Despite this, the government discontinued this Commission after 1919 and it took years of pressure from farmers to get the Canadian Wheat Board established in 1936. The Wheat Board was given power to buy all Canadian wheat at reasonable prices, to allocate equitable quotas for delivery, and to sell the wheat at the best price.

Alongside these developments have been the transportation problems. The prairies are landlocked; railways were needed to get the wheat to ships. U.S. farmers have been able to move their grain through the Mississippi Inland Waterway, kept up by the American government at no cost to the user. The Canadian farmer has had a comparable subsidy through the Crow's Nest Pass Rates Agreement. This agreement, concluded in 1897 between the Canadian Pacific Railway and the federal government, gave the CPR 3.7 million acres (originally a land grant to an old railway that the CPR had bought) and a subsidy of $3.4 million to help build a line through the Crow's Nest Pass to open up the mineral fields in the Kootenay Mountains in opposition to American penetration. In return, the CPR agreed to move grain and flour eastward out of the prairies for one-half cent per ton/mile "in perpetuity". In 1918 the rate was raised somewhat, but in 1925 a Statute of Parliament reset the rate at one-half cent per ton/mile both eastward and westward and applied it to both the CPR and the Canadian National Railway.

While the 1925 law brought the farmers a victory, there have still been problems. Every kid growing up on the prairies, it seems, thinks that "CPR" is some kind of swear-word. The railways keep affirming that the Crow Rates are a losing proposition for them. Farmers keep insisting, as did a National Farmers Union brief in Harris, Sask., that the railways are primarily a public service and should not be allowed to drag their feet and give bad service to a market as important as Canada's wheat exports.

THE CPR

The idea that a privately owned corporation could be effectively used as an instrument of national policy was perhaps a forgivable delusion in 1880, although it is worth noting that there were some even at that time who had the insight to question it.

— NFU Local 601, Humboldt, Sask.

Chief Justice Hall [of the Hall Commission on Grain Handling] said that in his opinion, from the beginning nobody in the government or the railway ever expected that Western grain could be handled at a profit and that the Crow Rates were part of the deal that the East owed the West to join Confederation.

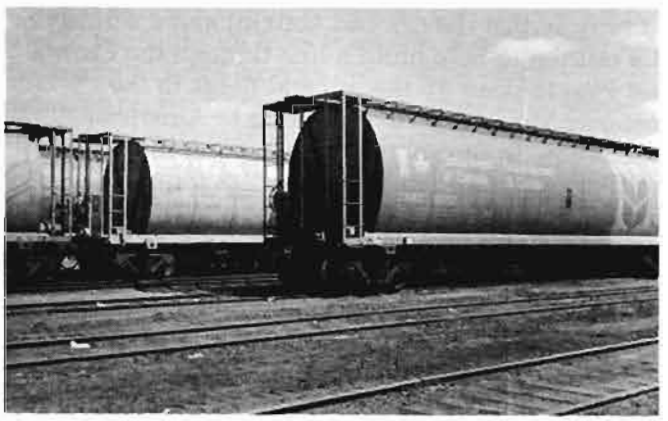
— Harris Wheat Pool.

The position of Canadian Pacific in this web of business connections is central. Its directors also occupy positions on the boards of other major corporations in Canada — companies such as Inco, Stelco, Dofasco, MacMillan-Bloedel, Bell Canada, Brascan and perhaps most significantly, the major banks.... A government trying to impose its will on the CPR has to deal not simply with one company but with the entire hard core of Canadian business.

— NFU Local 601, Humboldt, Sask.

Other briefs pointed out that the CPR has made billions of dollars from the land and mines given to it in the Agreement. When the company claims losses from handling grain, it is not including in its calculations profit from these land-parcels and mines.

Beginning in 1973, a rapid series of events rocked the precarious balance in the wheat market and alarmed many Western farmers. Cargill Grain, the largest grain trader in the world with assets four times larger than the three provincial wheat pools combined, and 1976 sales nearly four times that of the Canadian Wheat Board, bought a private elevator company in Canada. At about the same time, Otto Lang, then Minister responsible for the Wheat Board, took the selling of feed grain within Canada away from the Wheat Board, thus creating a large opening for Cargill and other private concerns.



Shipping grain: losing control to the multinationals.

CARGILL

Cargill, Incorporated is an American-based grain trading company which has expanded its operations to over thirty-six other countries. . . .

Internationally, Cargill is primarily involved in the purchase, sale, and delivery of grain. About half of its income is derived from grain trading; the remainder is generated by activities ranging from barge-building to metals-trading.

— Gale Burke, Calgary, Alta.

World grain trade is controlled by five large companies: Cargill Grain, Inc., Continental Grain Co., Cook Industries, Bunge Corporation, and Louis Dreyfus. These five firms control eighty-five per cent of the U.S. grain exports. . . . Cargill is the largest.

Cargill Grain is a privately-owned corporation (owned by two Minneapolis families: the MacMillans and the Cargills) which has twenty-five per cent of the U.S. export market. Cargill Grain sales in 1973 were $5.3 billion ($11 billion in 1976). Two-thirds of the profits in 1973 were obtained by Cargill Grain's foreign operations.

[Its] headquarters is in a vast information computer centre in Minneapolis. . . . The overseas operations are managed out of Geneva under the name Tradax Geneva. . . .

Cargill alone contributes $1 billion to the U.S. balance of payments. . . .

In 1975, Cargill's net worth was $600 million. The Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba Wheat Pools had a net worth together of $127 million. In 1976 Cargill sales were $11 billion; Canadian Wheat Board sales were $3 billion.

— Local 619, NFU, Harris, Sask.

With the stabilizing power of the Wheat Board undermined, Cargill, the CPR and Otto Lang began a concerted attack on the Crow Rates, under Lang's banner of "user pay".

This attack was coupled with Cargill's plan, backed by Lang, to build Inland Terminals, large-sized, high-volume "throughput" structures. Farmers were quick to point out that there would be very few of these Inland Terminals. Elevators might be "inefficient" to some, but the fact that they dot the prairie landscape means that farmers do not have to haul their grain very far. Before the days of trucks, when farmers hauled with horses, there was supposed to be an elevator within six miles of each farmer (otherwise hauling trips would be overnight). More recently, the pools have tried to guarantee that none of their members would have to haul more than twenty-five miles to an elevator. The cost to the farmer of hauling to an elevator is extremely important: that cost is estimated by the Rail Action Committee to be one cent per bushel/mile. Since there are thirty-six bushels a ton, this means that trucking wheat costs a farmer seventy-two times what the Crow Rates cost him. And the average haul to an Inland Terminal is estimated to be about fifty miles. Farmers said that since they were picking up so much more of the transportation costs, it is no wonder the Inland Terminal concept looked so "efficient" to promoters such as Cargill.

It was also argued that shutting down elevators would destroy much of the rural community which had until now survived. For instance, at least half of the ninety-three community shipping points in the Weyburn area would be closed. Many small villages in the prairies only have two or three businesses. If the elevator closed, the other businesses would likely fold too.

Lang's next move, announced Jan. 1, 1975, was the scheduled abandonment of 6,808 miles of branch railway lines in the prairies. To farmers this meant that victories won over thirty years were being taken away by a minister from their own home ground — Saskatchewan. Geoffrey Ursell, a Saskatchewan folksinger, wrote a song that went "When we sing Otto Lang, we're singing two four-letter words".

As Don Mitchell argued at the hearing in Regina: "What is really at stake is control over the grain

resource in the foreseeable future. Under the Canadian Wheat Board, grain had become a publicly-regulated commodity with limited profit potential for either the railways or private grain trade. But with a return to the flexibility of the open market, the possibility of unloading a greater burden of the costs on to farmers and the lifting of the long-standing Crow Rates, the profit future is golden for agribusiness."

The two earlier cases illustrated a struggle for control of local markets — the Thunder Bay market or, for tomatoes, the Canadian market. But the stakes are much larger in the wheat market, because Canada is a major supplier on the world scene. Political economist H.E. Bronson's brief in Saskatoon explains this struggle for control of Canada's export potential. Cargill, Bronson says, "is supported by thirty to forty banks. . . . The lead bank is David Rockefeller's Chase Manhattan. . . ." Rockefeller is the man who began the Trilateral Commission (founded in 1973 by high-level government and corporate leaders to formulate a united response to the "demands" of developing nations for change) and has called for a "true world economy . . . with growing internationalism and economic co-operation."

It is important to understand what this really means. In 1966, U.S. foreign policy shifted from keeping large wheat stocks, sold at a loss to poor nations, to a policy of reducing wheat stocks through a hard commercial sell and a cutback in supply. The instruments of this hard sell abroad have been the large private grain firms, with Cargill in the lead.

The result is manipulative control of the world cereals market by these firms. As the companies force transportation costs up for Canadian farmers, and prices down, they will be in a position to buy up agricultural land, as they have done in Brazil and the United States. They can also manipulate food shortages into enormous speculative profits. On at least two occasions, American courts have convicted Cargill of price fixing.

There is, as H.E. Bronson says, "power in concentrated control of exportable food." If the Canadian Wheat Board loses control of Canadian grains to the multinationals, the firms will use Canada's ability to grow grain for their own purposes, not Canada's.

When the Trends Converge . . .

The trend to larger processors and to larger farms is quite dramatic in the tomato industry. Food supply lines are getting longer and more complicated as they fall into the control of a few large firms. This is also clear from the Thunder Bay case. The cost-price

Don Mitchell, author of *The Politics of Food*, working in his greenhouse.

squeeze is destroying many smaller producers and suppliers.

The case of wheat shows how the government — though it is elected to serve the needs of all the people — can influence the course of events to the benefit of the multinational corporations. Because transportation is a crucial element in the wheat system, the government has found it easy to influence the system. Its earlier insistence on the Crow Rates and its creation of a Wheat Board with power to stabilize the market show that government can make important, and beneficial, changes. The present struggle in wheat will go on.

How are we to evaluate the trends? Many people who came to our hearings thought they spelled disaster. While in the short term these trends have meant cheaper food, in the long term they mean that Canada will become less self-sufficient and a net importer of more expensive food.

Others, however, look upon these trends as simply the result of economic common sense. Brian Flemming, formerly a top aide of Pierre Trudeau and a member of the Trilateral Commission, spoke to the Halifax hearing as Liberal candidate in the May, 1979 federal election: "Research tells us Canada is becoming more and more specialized in what it exports. The fact that we are selling more wheat, related grains and fish and selling less and less of everything else has a profound effect on our primary producers. They will go where the action is even if it means in the long run we have to bring our basic fruit and vegetables from the market gardens of New Jersey, California and Texas."

Perhaps one way to evaluate these trends is to look at them through the eyes of someone from the Third World. For instance, Michael Als, an organizer with the Bank and General Workers' Union in Trinidad, warned the Commission that the same process which has left so many of his people

CANADA VS. TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

There are many problems I have listened to here today at the Regina hearing that are very similar to the problems that exist in Trinidad and Tobago.

Events after the Second World War dramatically altered the direction of our agriculture.... The domination of agriculture by multinational corporations began to reduce food consumption to the profit motive....

The multinational corporations encouraged larger producers on the one hand, and stifled the smaller ones on the other.... Thousands of small and medium producers and agricultural employees lost their livelihood and their jobs. The tremendous decline in small farming resulted in domestic production falling and had a severe effect on the living conditions of the population as a whole. It resulted in scarcity of... food and the problem faced by all the people in capitalist countries — inflation.

It is important I should raise here the method used by the multinational corporations to squeeze out the smaller guy. A good example would be in pigs and poultry. Both pigs and chickens started with small farmers.... What happened when this was discovered to be profitable? The bigger companies came in.... The first thing was the alliance of local firms and foreign multinationals.... The cost of feed went up until the small farmer could not afford to maintain his farm.... The government, big local corporations and multinationals bought land when the small farmers were forced out of production. They bought it and introduced large scale production. They also got control over subsidies.... The government was providing subsidies. Most did not go to small farmers; they went to the big corporations.

[The corporations] also controlled the markets. It was very systematic. When markets came into their control it meant that farmers had to sell at their price....

They also controlled the technology. These firms who were in agriculture were the same firms who sold the tractors, the ploughs, the trucks, the chemicals and so on.... So it was impossible for small agricultural activity to survive, because the prices of these things were put up way beyond the capacities of small farmers....

With increasing control of the companies, the price of food increasing, the number of producers declining, the dependence of the country on exports and imports increased. The agriculture was not organized around feeding the local people, but exporting cheap products based on the low labour cost. Workers were severely suppressed.... They can't make incomes that would let them keep up with the cost of living....

The big companies, not only in my country, but in the developed countries as well, have begun to establish complete control over supply and demand....

They said that with the mechanization, with the development of larger farms, the consumer would be provided with a better product. The cold reality is in fact that the quality of the goods has fallen, even though the prices have risen tremendously.

I think that it is important for me to sound a warning here to small and medium farmers to take up a very strong, very resilient position against the continuing control by the corporations over marketing, over prices, over the land... and develop powerful political lobbies to attempt to force the multinational corporations, and those who protect the multinationals, out of the hegemony they have, not only in agriculture and food, but in nearly everything... we use as consumers.

Many of the Third World countries are becoming increasingly dependent on the multinational corporations for survival; not only the Third World countries, but the developed countries too. Once their control is tightened, it is difficult for small people to do anything against them.... The control of the multinational corporations is taking away people's control over their own livelihood, economically and politically, and we must alert ourselves.

— Michael Als, guest of CUSO at hearing in Regina, Sask.
Michael works with the Bank and General Workers' Union in Trinidad and Tobago.

drastically short of food is underway in Canada. But many Canadians dismiss any parallels between our experience and that of the less developed nations. Canada, they say, has abundant natural resources, technology and organizational expertise, all of which poorer nations lack. However, research — spelled out, for instance, in the book *Food First* and in OXFAM's brief to the Commission in Toronto — shows that most of the poorer countries could feed themselves if they had control over their own land and distribution. There is, argued OXFAM, "irrefutable evidence to dispel the myths of over-population and the scarcity of food and land." The main cause of hunger is that "2.5 per cent of landowners with more than 100 hectares control nearly three-quarters of all the land in the world, with the top 0.23 per cent controlling over half."

Dorothy Schick of Toronto told us:

> The foods we import are, in many cases, being produced by agribusinesses in other countries. These businesses not only use the best land in the Third World, but hire peasants to work for the lowest possible wage while neglecting their own plots of land.... Many Third World countries are capable of producing enough food for their own needs but instead they raise crops for export.... The fodder consumed by Mexican cattle contains more protein than the diet of the campesinos who tend them. Agriculture for export flourishes in Mexico — while the amount of protein available per inhabitant **fell** between 1970 and 1976, and in one rural area only one of every five Mexican kids has normal weight and height.

At the Vancouver hearing, Evelyn Perez and Maria Santos told about what happened to their home region in the Philippines when corporations bought the land where rice for the people had been grown: "The four large multinationals have

agreements with a few large growers. Dole and Del Monte each have six thousand hectares under contract. United Fruit has five thousand hectares, Sumoto has three thousand hectares. . . . About ninety per cent of the people in the area are poor. Many are starving. . . . I think when you get cash crops that do not get to be eaten by the people who planted them, you are in danger. Your people are in danger."

Over and over we heard people make the same analysis about Third World countries: their land has been taken over by multinationals to grow one or two cash crops (as a "monoculture") while the people who once farmed the land go hungry. As we have seen, others argue in favour of "efficiency" and "interdependence". But the growth of the multinationals' control of the world food trade has not made the peoples of the world more interdependent. It has simply made everyone more dependent upon the corporations. As an example, Bob Anderson in Richmond, B.C., hypothesized that self-sufficiency for Bangladesh would mean the United States would lose a market for 200 thousand to 400 thousand tons of its rice. Bob Anderson told us about a conversation he had with the largest rice trader and processor in Texas. "I'm against the transfer of technology," the Texan told him. "I want Bangladesh in here on her knees every year. My farmers come first." The question this raises for Canadians, Bob Anderson said, is whether our Canadian Wheat Board needs China or Russia "on its knees" every year. "What will happen to Saskatchewan farmers when overseas needs are reduced? We should foresee the day."

Because Canadian farmers are forced into specializing for the export market, they are made dangerously dependent on the large international corporations that control trade from country to country. Because Canadian consumers are forced into buying the produce of other countries, they are made dangerously dependent on the ability of the corporations to find labourers at a very low wage. In both cases, much of our prosperity is dependent upon the hunger of others. At the same time, Third World countries are quite often the scene of brutal repression of essential trade union rights, despite popular pressures there to increase wages and thus better supply basic needs. It appears that Canadians depend upon the power of the multinationals to keep us on the "positive" side of this international imbalance.

In its brief to the Saskatoon hearing, the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace predicted where this kind of dependence would lead us: "[Agribusinesses] will try to keep us somewhat comfortable because after all, right now, we are the only market they can depend on. But soon they . . . will be the only source of food for us. Then we, like the tenant farmer of the Third World, will no longer have any bargaining power. We will have to comply with their 'rules'."

This dependency upon multinational corporations is what the visitors from the Third World were warning about. Once multinationals control the use of the land, they control your food supply; and then you are dependent upon them.

In light of this historical pattern it is not surprising that many progressive governments in the Third World have been characterized by food policies aiming at self-reliance, with land at the centre of

Maize storage area built by the campesinos organized under UPAGRA (Union of Small Farmers in the Atlantic Region), Santa Rosa, Costa Rica. The sign says, "Those of us organized in UPAGRA have built this locale for the benefit of the campesinos."

these programs. Most often, when these governments try to implement their objectives, they are tagged "communist" by political leaders in the United States and Canada, as well as by corporate executives.

Chile's history over the past ten years provides a startling example of this. Chile, long, narrow, mountainous, rich in copper and other minerals, was long one of the wealthier and more industrialized countries in Latin America. Part of the program of Salvador Allende — President until murdered in the coup by Pinochet in 1973 — was land reform, involving the transferral of arable land from large landowners to the peasants. But Chile had always required food imports. In order to put pressure on Allende, the United States "cut off food credits, and just before the coup, as a 'political decision of the White House' it refused cash sales of wheat to Chile." (H.E. Bronson, Saskatoon, Sask.)

Despite these difficulties, Chile under Allende was able to feed about eighty-five per cent of its people adequately, according to the brief tabled by the Calgary Chilean Association. However, since 1973, the Chilean policy has been to "grow crops for exports, such as grapes, peaches, wine, apples and other luxuries". There have been "dramatic increases in the value of food imports [to Canada] since [1973]", the Vancouver Chilean Association said. "The Chilean junta is able to bid attractively on the world market [i.e., sell cheaply] because its barbaric repressions inside Chile have reduced wages and consumption to starvation levels. . . . Catholic Church sources report extreme examples of urban districts with eighty-six per cent unemployment and ninety-two per cent malnutrition." The Calgary group estimates that eighty-five per cent of Chileans now do not make enough to buy sufficient food.

The Calgary group summarized: "The Pinochet government has to be regarded as a puppet regime. The real power behind the throne is in the hands of the transnational corporations."

Canadians, it is true, have a history of feeling complacent about the prosperity that foreign ownership has brought them, despite the warnings we receive. Many urban people still think of some of the trends developing in the food system as annoyances — a falling off of quality and a difficulty of obtaining fresh local produce. But farmers, feeling the squeeze in their daily work, echo the words of a New Brunswick potato producer, who shook his head and asked, "If Canadian agriculture is driven under, what's going to happen?" In Humboldt, Sask., Helen MacFarlane answered: "Canadians [will] have relinquished control over their own destiny and their own environment."

The different trends converge into one: loss of control over how we feed ourselves, over what we eat.

3 Going Against the Grain: The Logic of the System

IF YOU take a look at the Wednesday issue of a daily newspaper, you're likely to spot full-page ads proclaiming in no uncertain terms all the Great Savings to be made that week, on all sorts of food (Special on Pork Chops! Special on Head Lettuce!) If you follow this up with a visit to your local supermarket, you'll find row after row jam-packed with grocery products and produce. The message of such well-organized abundance and choice seems to be that the system is working. At a glance, it would appear that the food system in Canada is one of the most efficient and productive in the world, that it is an integral part of Canadian prosperity in general.

In Toronto, the Grocery Products Manufacturers of Canada, a body representing ninety-five companies, submitted a brief that stated, "The most remarkable aspect . . . is that [food] prices have not risen higher, and that Canadians continue to enjoy one of the world's lowest food bills proportionate to income." Similarly, Orville Lee, a farmer in Ontario's Grey County, remarked on the inexpensiveness of food in Canada and said, "We have one of the best food distribution systems in the world. Only about eighteen cents out of every dollar are spent on food. We should be and probably are the best-fed people in the world." And likewise, an industrial engineer working in the food trade, Rick Symme, said at a hearing in Brampton that by and large the Canadian consumer is very well served by the Canadian food system.

But in fact the testimony to the Commission revealed something different, that what is really happening in the Canadian food system is the direct opposite of what people might have cause to expect. And that there is a growing feeling of disappointment, that needs are not being met. The

Reproduced from the cover of *The Supermarket Tour.*

trends uncovered in the inquiry point to a series of important ironies entrenched in the present system:

• An industrialized food system, that by its nature involves intensive use of land and mechanical labour-saving devices, is supposed to bring us cheap food. Instead, dependence upon fossil fuels and the control of the system by a few huge corporations means food so expensive that the working poor and people on fixed incomes cannot afford enough to eat.

• An industrialized food system is also supposed to improve the quality of our food. Instead, it brings health and behavioural problems caused by chemical additives, residues and overprocessing. Science has been harnessed to enhance profits, not quality. We have been given the illusion of good food by bright packaging and sugar, but we are less and less well nourished.

• An industrialized agricultural system is supposed to increase farm productivity. Indeed, it has done so until now, but at a terrible cost. Chemicals have fed the plants but not the soil. We stand in grave danger of depleting our agricultural land and of embalming our environment.

• Canada, as one of the "breadbaskets of the world", is supposed to derive prosperity and jobs from the production of food, and its technology is supposed to help feed the world. Instead, corporate control makes us dependent on an agribusiness structure that ensures poverty and starvation in poorer countries and regions. Because of the international agribusiness links, increased standards of living and food self-sufficiency for the poor in the Third World may well translate into even higher prices for Canadian consumers. At the same time, in Canada, we have sacrificed our own food self-sufficiency, health and a decent standard of living for the urban and rural poor who make up more than twenty per cent of our population. And, in an extension of this irony, as the corporations continue to tighten their hold on the world food market, Canadian farmers and workers are losing their jobs: they are getting replaced by machinery, and by companies moving to take advantage of cheap labour in the Third World.

A display presented at the Ottawa hearing by the interchurch organization, Ten Days for World Development.

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These realities, as harsh as they may seem, are the inevitable consequences of the evolution of a particular kind of food system to its present state. For example, if we mine the soil without replenishing it, we can only expect to find serious depletion of this invaluable resource. Similarly, if we rely increasingly on imported food, we can only expect the jobs of those whose production has been exported to disappear. This inevitable and not always slow drift to destruction is built into the internal logic of the system.

Food and Profits

The ironies of the food system haven't appeared by accident. They are the result first of all of a food system centred around profit-making — a condition which is usually regarded as "normal". "I'd submit . . . that the profit-bashers are wasting their time, like the cat watching the wrong mouse-hole," Rick Symme told the hearing in Brampton, Ont. The Commission heard from a variety of people, from a small grocer to the owner of a small food chain to the Grocery Products Manufacturers of Canada, who all maintained the legitimacy of profits as a primary goal for food production and distribution. "Profits are needed to attract the new investment that the industry must have to meet the changing needs of Canadians in the 1980s," the GPMC said in its brief. "Without profits, this industry cannot survive."

In fact, this quest for profits has been supremely successful. Although in its brief the GPMC insisted that from 1973 to 1977 profits in the food industry had fallen, other sources give a different perspective. The *Globe and Mail* "Report on Business" section, Nov. 6, 1979, quoted a government survey which found that in the food processing sector four companies had increased their profits from 1973 to 1978 by 937.5 per cent (or more than nine times). In case these four companies were not typical, we compared the net incomes for 1973 and 1978 of the fourteen largest food companies (processing and merchandising) in Canada as reported in the annual survey of *Canadian Business* magazine. The average return on equity for these companies in 1978 was a solid 14.6 per cent and their 1978 net income was 176.6 per cent of their 1973 net income.

If profits and a healthy food system that adequately served people's needs were compatible, there would be no problem. But, as we've seen in Chapters One and Two, this is not the case. And this failure is something that bothers many people and organizations. The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour told the Commission:

> Canadian people have long since abandoned the idea that the health industry should be controlled by profit-oriented private corporations. In Saskatchewan we are quite comfortable with the fact that the delivery of energy, electricity, oil and gas to private homes is a public utility and not the proper place for profit. . . . And yet the delivery of food, which cannot be less important than health or heating, is almost completely controlled by a handful of huge multinational corporations whose interest is in the almighty profits and not in the needs and well-being of producers, workers or consumers.

FOOD COMPANY INCOMES

Company	1978 net income '000's	1978 return on equity	1973 net income '000's
Weston	50,615	16.6	34,629
Dominion	20,836	15.9	13,664
Provigo	13,859	22.5	3,541
Canada Safeway	46,276	14.6	23,216
Steinberg	25,730	14.3	16,729
Canada Packers	18,113	9.8	14,097
Oshawa Group	7,766	9.0	7,590
M. Loeb	8,696	n.a.	3,247
Kelly, Douglas	10,640	10.8	1,346
Burns	5,595	n.a.	4,563
Maple Leaf Mills	15,169	16.1	7,859
General Foods	17,318	16.2	10,329
Kraft (from 1974)	21,366	31.1	10,113
Standard Brands	10,091	9.8	7,542

— *Canadian Business*, annual survey

The brief of the Canadian Food and Allied Workers in Manitoba added to this by saying, "We are disturbed . . . by profits in the industry, which we believe are a significant part of the prices you pay when you buy in the store." Betsy Hanson in Windsor, Ont., said the problem with taking profits, and their main ally, growth, as the primary criteria for success is that concerns for other values, such as human costs and quality of life, get left behind. Brewster Kneen, who farms in Pictou County, N.S., agrees: "The greater the concern for profit, it would seem, the less concern for the economy, that is for the welfare of society." And in Regina, Sask., Don Mitchell told us that those who control the food system have "industrialized agriculture as a means to the objective of mining the land and its people for more profit".

In the Canadian food system profits and economic growth leave other values behind.

What's Wrong with Profits?

What are people saying when they criticize profits? It is true that every enterprise, whether it be factory or farm or store, has to produce some kind of economic surplus, enough to pay for its own operations with some left over for the necessary upkeeps, improvements, or expansion. People did not seem to be criticizing this ability to produce a surplus; the main point of organizing human labour should be to generate that extra something which means people will not be forever scrambling just to survive.

The question is how this surplus is used, and who controls it. The Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG) suggests that there is a distinction to be made between "economic surplus" and "profit". "Profit," OPIRG says in its publication *The Tomato Papers*, "is that proportion of the surplus that allows owners to increase their ownership and their power to make decisions in their own best interests with us all bearing the consequences."

In the food system, many people work at different levels, in different ways, to contribute not only their labour but also their experience and ingenuity towards producing the food necessary for everyone. An important distinction emerges, however, when fewer and fewer people, or groups of people, take control over the surplus generated by these many. The surplus becomes the private, exclusive property of these few people, who then have the sole power to

decide what happens to it. Usually the decisions involve making a run at even greater surplus, often at the expense of other people's well-being.

PROFIT

The word "profit" means different things when it is used by different people. When a farmer uses the word, he is talking about the difference between his costs and the money he gets for his product. His profit is what he and his family must live on. When a company uses the word, it means what is left over after salaries, wages, overhead, taxes, depreciation and all other expenses are paid. It is the money left to reinvest, to strengthen control of the market, or to distribute to shareholders.

A farmer who does not make a profit goes hungry. While a company that did not show a profit over a number of years could go bankrupt, the difference lies in the control and expansion of capital for production, as against simply making a living. During the Food Commission we often heard farming people defend corporate profits. After a question or two, we would discover that they were equating "making a profit" with making a living. But, as a study of corporate profit shows, they are not the same thing.

The concentration of ownership and diversity of interests controlled by the large food companies is one part of this control. These developments provide them with the ability, for instance, to manipulate their accounts to hide the real story. The Ontario Anti-Poverty Organization pointed out in its brief that: "The monopoly control exercised by the giants, such as Weston's, blankets retailing, wholesaling, processing, packaging, advertising, transportation, and the very crops in the field." The business sections of our newspapers, and our trade publications, tell the rest of the story. The biggest companies are so diversified that they can set up bookkeeping situations that enable them to show a loss in any one operation if necessary.

King Midas, according to the Greek myth, wanted to become the richest man on earth, and was delighted with his "golden touch" — until suppertime. Perhaps the Greeks had already seen that a food system designed for profit could not fulfill the need for nourishment. When the first goal is profit rather than food, the whole system becomes distorted, and those who own the profit become pitted against those who want to eat good food or work to produce good food.

Earlene Horne from St. Vincent makes a presentation at the Penticton, B.C. hearing.

WHERE DOES PROFIT COME FROM?

Many people have the impression that when something is sold someone adds up all the costs of materials and labour and then tacks a bit extra on. That "bit extra" is the profit. In fact, that image of profit is false. It would be like creating money out of thin air.

What are we paying for when we buy something? Let's take a fish for example. It has no nutritive value to human beings while it is swimming around in the sea. It only has a value as food when it has been caught, processed and brought to where it can be used as food. And what of the machine that processes the fish or the truck that transports it? The metal has no economic value while it is sitting in the ground. This comes only after it has been mined, refined and made into a machine or a truck. The financial value of fish is based on the total value of the labour that caught it, processed it, made the machines for processing, made and drove the truck, did the bookkeeping for the plant, placed it on the shelf of the store, refined the energy to keep it frozen, etc. That is what the consumer pays for.

Whoever owns the boat and factory and truck makes a profit by taking the full value of the labour from the customer, and then paying back less to those who did the labour. Profit, then is the difference between what all the labour was actually worth and what the labourers were paid for doing it. Profit depends on the exploitation of labour.

Profits and Control

A standard defence of the food system as it operates at present is that such a structure promotes efficiency, or is necessary for efficiency. But at the Toronto hearing, Ted Creese told the Commission that "The name of the game is not really efficiency, it is control." In the intricate workings of the food system, control is the partner of profit: you can't have one without the other. That is, if you want to have maximum profit, you must also have maximum control.

The way this works, of course, is that the more profit the food companies make, the more they can establish control over the market. But the people who run corporations want control of a market in order not simply to make profits **now** (this year or next) but to make sure that they can continue to make profits as far into the future as possible. Pillsbury Ltd., for instance, bought up Green Giant in 1978 for a price about fifty per cent higher than might be expected (the price paid amounted to seventeen times Green

Giant's annual earnings). A *Wall Street Journal* analyst wrote at the time that this was "a pretty rich price to pay for a further entrance into the frozen-food shelf". The purchase was part of a long-range plan: Pillsbury had, up to then, been concentrating on the fast-food market; but its planners were predicting that by 1985 that particular market would be saturated; Pillsbury needed an associate firm "on-stream" which, by 1985, would show new growth potential. So the company was willing to pay the high price to buy Green Giant, even though it would not gain in returns for some years. For the large companies, such plans often look ahead as far as twenty-five years.

One of the results of this drive for control over the market is the ever-increasing concentration of ownership — and the deaths of smaller businesses which don't have the money and other resources to compete in the marketplace with the burgeoning giants. Nineteenth-century economists foresaw the ruthlessness of capitalist competition; but they didn't foresee that the process would continue until only two or three owners survived. According to the theory, firms would get flabby as they grew larger, and would show their age. Then younger firms would spring up to take their places. This hasn't happened. While human beings grow old, the corporations tend to be immortal. They use the ideas and energy of their personnel, then leave them behind and gather up new people.

Logic would say that eventually there would be only one firm left. But this hasn't happened either. When there are only three or four contenders left in the field, the dust settles a bit. Each one knows that a monopoly is vulnerable to bad public opinion and government regulation. Each knows also that a real battle — a price war, for example — would do extensive damage to all of them. So they stand back and respect each other's turf.

Sometimes they literally divide up the country, as the major sugar companies have done. In March 1978, the Quebec Superior Court found Atlantic Sugar, Redpath and the St. Lawrence Sugar Company guilty of "conspiracy to limit competition". (This conviction has since been reversed by the Supreme Court of Canada.) In 1960 these companies had pleaded guilty to a similar charge. What happens is that they simply leave each other's

share of the market intact.

Sometimes companies actively co-operate with each other. In 1974, the Canadian Food and Allied Workers decided to strike the Swift packing plants in Alberta. They planned that the employees of the other two big meat packers, Burns Food Ltd. and Canada Packers, would support the strikers and then use the Swift contract as models for their own negotiations. However, as soon as the Swift workers went out on strike, Burns and Canada Packers locked out their own employees and insisted that the three companies would bargain as a unit. The same thing happened again in Ontario in 1978. These huge "competitors" are able to come to a "gentlemen's agreement" when it is in their best interests to act as a monopoly.

The word for a monopoly that is in fact made up of three or four firms "competing" according to the rules we have outlined above, is "oligopoly". Every part of the Canadian food system is more or less an oligopoly.

Controlling the Money

Controlling the market means controlling large amounts of money. Strong financial backing is a prerequisite for the development of new products, and especially for buying or building new plants or stores, or to expand by buying up other businesses. Often, firms find it necessary to make these sorts of moves quickly in order to keep an edge in the marketplace. It is not accidental, then, that the very large food companies have direct access to banks through the boards of directors of the financial institutions. For instance, in 1979 the directors of Dominion Stores and Argus Corporation (which controls Dominion) included two directors of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, two from the Toronto-Dominion Bank, and one each from the Bank of Montreal and the Bank of Nova Scotia. There were also four directors of Crown Trust, three directors of Canada Permanent Trust, as well as directors from five other trust companies.

This formidable array of financial power means that smaller rivals have a more difficult time getting loans that would enable them to challenge a chain like Dominion. One of the commissioners interviewed the owner of a small chain which competes effectively in one Canadian city with Dominion and a Weston subsidiary. This relatively small businessman said he was afraid to tell his banker any of his business plans for fear that it get back to one of his competitors. This means that until he actually goes to the bank for his loan, he cannot know if the bank will come through.

Controlling the Costs

The secret to keeping a business edge is not, as many people seem to believe, through underselling competition. It's really through spending money on such things as research, advertising, expansion and buying out competitors to take over their markets. In order to do these things, a company must keep its prices up and its costs down (thus expanding its profit margin). It's an expensive process: controlling costs through acquisitions requires, again, ready access to large amounts of capital.

As we've seen in earlier chapters, costs can be held down in a number of ways — by keeping wages down, by keeping unions out, by putting employees in competition with one another, by creating jealousy through privileges to some and not to others, by hiring part-time staff, or women, immigrants and students at lower wages.

Another means of controlling costs is by buying out suppliers or distributors. A food processing firm that owns the company making the harvesters, the company operating the trucks, the factory making the cartons and bottles, the firm importing and processing the sugar, the plant making the chemical additives and the company selling oil to all the rest — that firm can predict and control its costs. It can also, as we saw earlier, divide its profits among all these companies so that the total amount will never show in public. This process is called "vertical integration". The process of taking over direct competitors is called "horizontal integration". Studies of the Canadian food system show that all of the major firms involved, such as Weston's, Canada Safeway, Steinberg's and Dominion, are both horizontally and vertically integrated.

Controlling the Consumers: Advertising

Firms gain control over suppliers by buying them out. They get control over consumers through advertising. As C.W. Post, the founder of General Foods once said, "You can't just manufacture cereal. You've got to get it halfway down the customer's throat through advertising. Then they've got to swallow it."

The Ontario Public Interest Research Group quotes the *Canadian Grocer*: "For large scale advertising to work the buyer must be only partially informed about the nature of the product and the product must be complex enough so that precise evaluation is not possible."

And, of course, for that kind of misinformation to work, the consumer must be saturated with it, must be "conditioned". Thus, the expenditures on advertising are enormous. In 1978 the top twenty-two

food and beverage advertisers — from General Foods to Campbell Soup Co. and Hiram-Walker/Gooderham and Worts — spent $162.3 million on advertising, according to figures published in *Marketing* magazine.

This money is spent to maintain the companies' position, not to move ahead. The companies, in other words, have to run quickly simply to stand still. If they cut back even a bit on their advertising, experience shows that they lose large chunks of their market. On the other hand, in order to gain the marketplace, astronomic sums are required.

As the OPIRG publication *The Supermarket Tour* pointed out, consumers pay for this huge advertising expenditure in two ways. First, the cost of advertising is added to the cost of the product. Secondly, advertising limits competition, thereby increasing concentration and prices. The heavy outlays of advertising money are what keep new people from coming into the field. The cost also keeps the small firms very small and very vulnerable: here is where being big is the best edge of all. And then, to add insult to injury, the really large advertisers get big discounts for their volume trade — as high as sixty per cent. Then the big chains demand that their suppliers come in with them on "co-operative advertising" where the supplier pays part of the cost.

Bigger is not More Efficient

Contrary to popular belief, bigger is not more efficient (as the case studies in Chapter Two bear out). Bigger does produce more profit for the owners, but it does not produce more or better or cheaper food, or use fewer resources in the process. As a matter of fact, it's just the opposite. Firms, as we said earlier, must keep getting bigger to avoid falling behind. This means more spending on advertising, packaging and research. It means growing produce on company farms, in competition with family farms, in order to keep farmers' prices down (as happens, for instance, in New Brunswick, where by the mid-seventies the McCain Group already owned well over 4,500 acres of the best farm land and was adding to it quickly, in a province where the average farm size is under 100 acres). Often much of that produce goes to waste. It means throwing out any produce that does not fit the mechanical harvester. It means trucking live animals to Central Canada from other parts of the country and then trucking back the processed meat. It means importing tons of cheese while forcing Canadian milk producers to keep their production down. It means paying labour and management for company farms and stores rather than allowing independent farmers and grocers to run their own farms and stores at lower cost.

Ted Strain, a North Battleford, Sask. farmer at the Meadow Lake hearing.

One of the commissioners spent an afternoon with a retired executive of a very large regional wholesaler. The executive revealed that his firm had originally built up its edge by getting one retailer in a town to agree to buy only from it; in return the firm promised to help that retailer drive out his competition by teaching him new methods of merchandising. The retail outlet became more like a supermarket: moving groceries quickly for cash; getting out of giving credit and making deliveries, etc.) It worked. And as the other retailers folded, the wholesale competition had nobody to sell to and folded. But when some of the retailers wanted to sell out, the wholesaler was forced to buy them. The wholesale firm knew it would make its operation less efficient, but if it didn't buy the outlets, it knew that some national chain would buy in and then it would start to lose control of its turf. So, at the expense of efficiency, it got very big.

These are the steps in what you might call "the

dance of the giants". The steps are the moves large corporations must make in their struggle to maintain control and an edge over competitors. From the corporations' point of view, these moves are simply part of corporate life, what executives are paid to think up and carry out. From the point of view of the primary producer, the worker or the general public, they are wasteful expenditures of money taken out of their own hands. The dance leads to the waste of human labour, and the destruction of human health and well-being.

Competition and Control

We've seen how the giants dance. We still need to ask why they dance, why they feel forced into a life-and-death struggle for control. It would lead to over-simplified solutions if we thought that those who run corporations do what they do simply out of greed or lust for power. It is important to understand how those people feel constrained by the rules of the game they are in. In order to understand why corporations strive for ever more control, we need to examine the logic of the system, not the executives' heads. One way is to ask about the connection between money and control.

Money is only money. Put it in a sock and it is a dead and mouldering thing. Spend it on a big house and a car and all you've got is a house and a car. A person with money has choices, but only some choices will bring control. That is, economic surplus will only lead to more control if it is ploughed back into a business, as capital. Money only means power if it becomes capital, if it is used to own and control the means of producing more wealth. Someone who controls the means of producing more wealth has power, because that person stands at the gate, allowing other people in or keeping them out.

But, of course, the person who seeks to control the means of producing wealth is not alone in the quest. And since some people already own and control large amounts of capital, it will not bring much power to own a small amount. The logic of control demands that each owner of capital strive to own more.

A number of hearings were enlivened by dramatic presentations.

THE HOLE IN THEIR POCKET

They've got the world in their pocket,
Pocket, pocket, pocket,
Got the world in their pocket,
And they're up there in control.
They've got the world in their pocket,
They can shake it; they can rock it;
They can kick it for a goal.
They've got the world in their pocket,
And their pocket's got a hole!

— Chorus of "They've Got the World in Their Pocket", by Malvina Reynolds.

This is the real competition, the competition for control. In 1979, after Hudson's Bay had acquired Robert Simpsons Ltd., Brascan and the Thomson empire competed fiercely to buy and control The Bay. Thomson won, so it now controls Simpsons, The Bay and Zellers in the Canadian retail field. Little innovation is likely to result from this competition. Certainly the market is no better for the consumer. Similarly, we have seen how control of tomato processing has passed into the hands of four firms. This has not meant better tomatoes or better prices; in fact, evidence points to the contrary.

But, in any case, the competitive war escalates. If a corporation remained the same size it would soon be smaller relative to its rivals, and could be taken over. Even to stand still, corporations must run faster. Unless they continue to accumulate capital and grow more powerful, they will become less powerful.

This explains why (as George Crowell who teaches ethics at the University of Windsor remarked to the Windsor, Ont., hearing) "The more responsible corporations tend to be displaced by those that are more unscrupulous and exploitative." The law requires corporate executives to seek a maximum return for their shareholders. The rules of the game push them into an ever more frantic race to reinvest and gain ever more control.

Once they own everything from farms to farm machinery through to supermarkets, they start investing in other industries and other countries all over the world. In the past fifteen years there has emerged the "conglomerate", a corporation which buys existing firms in fields other than its own — anything — just so long as it can invest its money profitably and keep the capital working and growing.

Forces and Trends

Briefly, these are the trends in the food system: fewer people owning larger farms, boats, stores, businesses; the number of people earning a living in the food system going down; loss of social self-sufficiency; an industrialized food system that is supposed to be more efficient, but is less so; people caught in a cost-price or cost-income squeeze; a government that tends to support the big corporations.

Since businesses compete fiercely for control of the market, and since the main way to get control is to expand, and since a farm or business gets smaller (relative to the rest) unless it gets bigger, it is easy to see why there is a trend both among farms and among businesses to get big or get out.

Fewer people can work on their own independent farms, fishing boats or in their own grocery stores. Also, at all levels, owners of capital seek to cut their costs — and labour is one cost they can cut, by pushing people harder and by replacing people with machines. This explains why fewer and fewer people can make a living in the food system.

Among processors and wholesalers and retailers, the push for control and size means long, complex, centralized supply lines. They want to work with steady, large-volume supplies of uniform products. It is, then, not worthwhile to deal with local farmers. Even though, for instance, it costs more to buy produce in Ontario and ship it to Nova Scotia, it is worth that cost to maintain tight control of every aspect of the market. Even though it is less socially efficient for vertically-integrated corporations to own and operate in every level of the food system, the large firms buy up all they can in order to expand and control all the markets and inputs possible. Thus, as in the case of Thunder Bay, local suppliers are on the way to disappearing.

All of this centralization is carried out in the name of efficiency, but, as our examples have shown, what really happens is that the large firms, because they control the market so tightly, can push costs off onto consumers, farmers, the environment, the government — and call it "efficiency".

Very large firms control their suppliers and distributors by buying them out. Sometimes they decide to buy out the farms and run them themselves. But it appears they only do this if the farming operation can be highly mechanized — as happens, for instance, in growing potatoes or producing pork. But there are many kinds of farming that remain labour-intensive, especially those which involve the care of animals, and it is not worthwhile for large firms to try to run these operations. However, the companies' power in the market

Both price and uniformity standards force farmers into large capital costs for land and machinery.

enables them to control the farmers' operations as though they were their own. (All the farmer is really left with is the worry of making payments to the bank.) Large processors (as in the case of tomatoes or potatoes) set not only the prices they will pay the farmer, but also standards of uniformity. Both price and standards of uniformity force farmers into large capital costs (for land and machinery), into intensive use of land, and into the intensive use of chemicals. The "force" applied to farmers is financial. If they do not do these things, they cannot cover the costs (controlled by the large processors) with their income (also controlled by the large processors). The control which the large firms have over the market enables those firms to keep farmers in a "cost-income squeeze" and thus control the farm operation without the headache of ownership.

The case study of wheat (Chapter Two) shows that the government need not necessarily back the forces of business. In the past, the government has acted at times to equalize the power in the market between the farmer and large firms. In the past few years, however, for whatever reason, the government has backed the forces of centralization, namely the large firms. It has done this ostensibly in the name of "efficiency".

We began this chapter by pointing out a series of ironies in the way our food system operates. We can add two more to those:

- The free market was supposed to bring us our food efficiently, through competition. But what this really means is that large firms cut their costs without cutting prices. So farmers have been squeezed unmercifully, and saddled with debt. Besides, the entire system is grotesquely inefficient: corporations spend money to gain more control through excessive packaging and advertising, by buying up too many stores, by overprocessing, by establishing over-long supply lines. The system is

especially inefficient in terms of energy, which is now used intensively at every stage.

• The whole point of organizing an economic system is to satisfy people's basic needs for nutritious, affordable food, decent housing, health care, education and a sense of collective control over their destinies. But the system we live in is organized to maximize profit, bolster corporate control and accumulate capital at the price of human satisfaction. In this sense, the present system is anti-human.

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We have come to see that it is a short circuit to think of "bad guys" as the cause of people's problems. It is not the actors who must have a change of heart. Nor would it really help to remove the present actors. The script itself has to change. It is the logic, the momentum of the present system, which leads to the trends and the dissatisfactions.

We do not say this because we think the situation is hopeless. The present system is very tightly woven, that's true. But for a system to have a good chance of lasting peacefully, with everyone's consent, it has to fulfill not one condition but two.

It must not only be tightly planned and organized (as the present Canadian food system is) but it must also bring both satisfaction and a sense of control to most people. The message from most of the people who spoke to the Commission is that the Canadian food system does not do these things.

Jim Mayne, President of the National Farmers Union, said: "It's not a question of whether food prices will be controlled. They're already controlled. The real question is whether we will continue to let the corporations control prices or whether we will challenge those corporations for control." It's a challenge that will require organization and action.

Earlene Horne speaks to an adult class at the Debden Training Centre, Debden, Sask.

4 A Pinch of Salt, A Twist of Lemon: The Solutions

PEOPLE presented hundreds of briefs to the Food Commission. If those briefs did not suggest solutions to the food system dilemma, or at least indicate a direction to start off in, the commissioners attempted to draw more out during the question periods. However, often the solutions given caused us many more problems than the stories.

The accounts of the food system and its particular workings fitted together so that the commissioners were able to develop an overall picture of the food system and its trends, and to uncover the underlying forces which shape it. But people's opinions (about who's to blame, or what to do next) were contradictory and often confusing. We would do no one a service if we simply quoted people concerning their suggestions for action. First we need to sort out some of these contradictions.

The Role of the State

The majority of the suggested solutions depended to some extent on involvement or support of the state. Here, when we refer to "the state", we are talking about government in its broadest sense. It includes the legislature at all levels — federal, provincial, municipal — and all the institutions that support government — civil service, law, courts, prisons, schools, hospitals, police, military, health regulation agencies, even marketing boards (which are not directly government agencies, but exist under legislation and are often subject to a government veto). In general, people's suggestions concerning the state often contradicted their own stories about what the state actually does in the food system.

In the experiences of people who made submissions to the Commission, the government almost always appeared as part of the problem. Paul Windatt said that the government has followed the

Accounts of how the food system works melded together but opinions about what to do varied. Photos from the hearings at Meadow Lake, Sask. and Prince Edward Island.

MARKETING BOARDS

In Canada today there are many farmers and few buyers. But the power of the buyers, large corporations, is much greater than the power of individual farmers. Marketing boards are meant as a solution to this problem: they are a form of trade union organization whereby farmers unite to present the buyers with a common front. Even if the boards have no power to set prices or control imports, at least they limit the ability of the corporations to play off one farmer against the other in a given area.

The most successful marketing boards are those with some form of supply management. These include those handling milk, eggs, turkeys and broilers. These marketing boards issue licences to farmers and grant the farm a production quota. The total quota for a product is traditionally based on the average sales of the product over the previous few years.

In reality, what makes these supply management boards successful is their ability to control imports. The milk, turkey, and egg marketing boards have such controls. In 1979 the federal government established quotas on broiler imports following the creation of a new national chicken marketing board, so producers should have a stronger bargaining position than they have had in the past. Where quotas and licences exist, the price of the farm product is set by a pricing formula based on the cost of production.

For egg, milk and turkey producers, this has meant the achievement of "parity pricing". Their farm product prices go up (and occasionally down) with the inflation of farm costs. Because of this protection against the traditional cost-price squeeze, the quotas involved have obtained a capital value. Individuals who want to take up farming, or expand their present operations, are prepared to pay a price for this protection.

Fruit and vegetable marketing boards have less power; in some cases, they are mere selling agencies. In the "fresh market", there are no barriers to imports, and prices are usually set in the U.S. markets. The ability of the wholesalers and retailers to import large amounts of fresh fruits and vegetables weakens the bargaining power of these boards.

Farmers also face the problem of inter-provincial competition. Costs of production vary widely between provinces. Processors, wholesalers and retailers will bring in produce from lower cost areas to try to drive down local prices.

In some cases (recalling the "chicken and egg war" of the early 1970s), a provincial marketing board may produce more than it can sell in its own province and then sells (or "dumps" at a low price) excess production in another province. National marketing boards, such as those existing for wheat, industrial milk, eggs and turkeys, are attempts to extend orderly marketing to a national basis.

Many people, including farmers, are critical of boards. They are judged to be too conservative, or criticized for not engaging in market expansion and innovation. Quotas become windfall profits for the original producers but become barriers to entry for second-generation farmers. The quota system has tended to support established farmers. Marketing board policies have encouraged middle-sized family farm operations at the expense of small farmers.

Other farmers have claimed that the marketing boards have become captives and defenders of the large wholesale and retail chains. Many boards do not sell their produce to small chains, independents, roadside stands or farmers' markets.

Some consumers do not like the standardized product, the limited choice of produce variety and the excessive packaging and handling that the marketing boards and the retail chains support. Others point out that the marketing boards have served as protective umbrellas for processors, wholesalers and retailers, guaranteeing them a supply, while enabling all of the middlemen to take higher gross margins.

But if the People's Food Commission learned anything, it was that the majority of farmers, despite their grumblings, defend marketing boards as the only institution they have at this time to protect them from the ravages of "free enterprise" for farmers, and monopoly control for the corporations.

policy suggested in the 1970 Report of the Task Force on Agriculture, which urges that control of farming be put in fewer and fewer hands. Farmers told us about the effects of this policy: Agriculture Department representatives push them to get bigger and deeper in debt. Jack Winstead, a farmer in Grey County, Ontario, told how government recommendations push him to use more spray on his apples than he actually needs. According to both Ansel Ferguson in Prince Edward Island and Remi Lirette in Alberta, small fishermen are being forced out of business by government regulations. And when, in September 1979, small fishermen protested these regulations in Caraquet, N.B., the police attacked them with tear gas. Unemployment Insurance policies weave the net tighter around the small fishermen, who must sell to the large processors in order to get credit for winter unemployment insurance.

As we've also seen in Chapter One, many people complained that the state-supported medical system does not make adequate protections for health. In fact, it spends vast amounts picking up the pieces of our mental and physical health while ignoring the evidence that many of the problems are caused by the profit-making strategies of private industry. For instance, the Canadian Cancer Society refuses to investigate the environmental causes of cancer, as Croft Woodruff pointed out in Vancouver. Hospitals, the Infant Formula Action Committee told us in Victoria, support baby formula manufacturers by presenting handout packages to mothers with new babies. A member of the audience at the Courtenay hearing said some women had been asked by the local school board to stop disseminating information about additive-free diets.

The government's cheap food policy contributes to the farmers' cost-income squeeze. For instance, Joe Mori in Kamloops pointed out that import regulations allow Safeway to drive local producers

out of the vegetable business by bringing in cheaper produce from the States. Meanwhile, federal health inspectors seem to give local producers selling in roadside stands much more trouble than they give the large chains, according to testimony from at least two farmers. And government policy adds to farmers' costs since their planning and zoning encourages the expansion of cities on to farm land, driving up the price of land artificially, according to the Farmers Institute in Chilliwack, B.C.

As we heard people's stories, the picture was clear. The state can come to people's aid, but its role is largely to support the trend away from people having control of their food system.

People also gave us ample evidence to support the conclusion that lobbying the government to change the present trends does not work very well. We heard about letter-writing campaigns, boycotts, lobbying, law suits and direct involvement in elections. These have raised considerable public support and attention, but have had little effect on the policies of state agencies. Anne Ross of the Mount Carmel Clinic in Winnipeg told us of her group's campaign to lower the price of milk.

> What really triggered our fight against high prices was an election promise to keep subsidies on milk; but as soon as elected, lo and behold!... We started a petition to get the price of milk down. We went from coast to coast... and collected about twenty thousand signatures.... We seemed to get nowhere with Ottawa and we continued the pressure.... It ended up with Ottawa asking me to go out on a campaign to promote powdered milk on which there was still a subsidy. Since there was no guarantee that subsidies would remain on powdered milk it no doubt would have been a futile effort; and as it was, soon all subsidies were also removed on powdered milk.

Mary Rawson (second from left) and Jack Warnock (third from left), two B.C. commissioners, talk with producers in Chilliwack, B.C.

Through experiences like this one, many people have come to the point where they realize that the government simply is not on their side. The Windsor United Auto Workers Retirees' Council says that "The present policy of the senior levels of government... is to restrict production to what can be sold profitably and not to what are the needs of the people." Bill Gibbs of Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan, told us that the government is not really interested in consumers: "Perhaps its allies are the multinational corporations who are creating a very unhealthy economic climate for consumers."

The Committee for Canadian Self-Reliance in Saskatoon has come to the conclusion, "Since there is no hope that the major political parties of today will adjust to what is necessary, the Commission should recognize the need for new political organizations, dedicated to a self-reliant economy, including food."

In a democratic country, the state is supposed to represent the majority, if not all, of the people. How does it come to represent instead the interests of a small but powerful minority? In the Commission's work, we came across several explanations for this.

One explanation we should eliminate right away. Often, when people are first disappointed by their failure to influence government they begin to think of the alliance between the state and the owners of capital as a deliberate conspiracy. We found no evidence of conspiracy between the state and agribusiness. The alliance results much more from a cast of mind, a way of thinking in which the people who make up the state participate.

THE ANTI-INFLATION BOARD

An assessment of the impact of price controls would not be complete without some reference to the compensation side of the program. One of the benefits that has accrued to industry has been the restoration of relatively stable labour markets. The Board monitors approximately forty-five per cent of the total work force in Canada.

Rates of increase in compensation as reported to the AIB have declined from a pre-October, 1975, level in excess of thirteen per cent to approximately nine per cent in 1977.

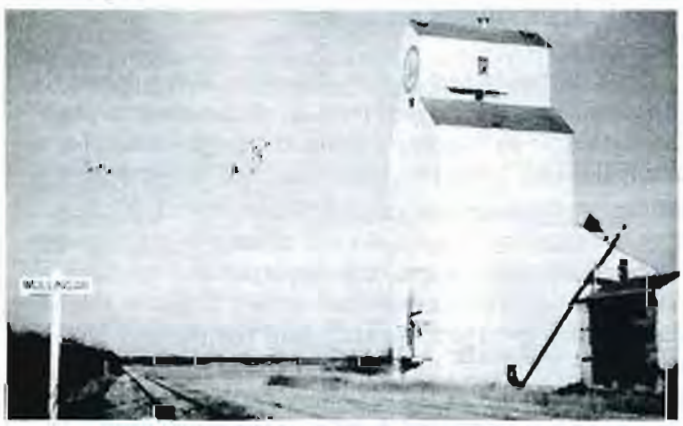
The existence of the compensation guidelines has also tended to limit the effectiveness of strikes. Man-days lost due to work stoppages in the food and beverage industry for example, declined from a peak of 441,000 days in 1975 to 165,000 in 1977 — down a significant sixty-two per cent.

— Presentation to the Grocery Products Manufacturers of Canada by the Anti-Inflation Board, April, 1978.

No matter what kind of social, political and economic system exists in a country, the role of its state structure is to preserve that system.

One of the state's main jobs, then, is to patch. If the economic system has cracks in its wall, the state's task becomes not to rebuild the wall, but to put up more wallpaper, or at best to fill in some cement. For instance, a basic task of the economic system is to provide employment for people so that they can buy the products of that system. The Canadian economy has some elementary flaws in its ability to provide full employment. The government sees its responsibility to make a few adjustments in the economy, not to take it over and change it. Politicians, like most people, have grown up to think that investment by private business is the normal, correct way to provide jobs. They therefore encourage the development of new industry by offering low taxes. When new industry does start, the state provides the roads, bridges, sewer systems, airports, mail delivery, schools, hospitals, police and other public services needed to service the new or expanded community. Once the new industry is established, the state also picks up after it, reclaiming contaminated land, giving grants for pollution-control equipment and providing social services for workers and their families. Moreover, especially in poorer provinces, the government remains constantly under the threat from businesses that if the necessary conditions are not met, they will pull out, leaving more people unemployed.

The state's task to patch things up is largely fixed by the growing gap — discussed in Chapter Three — between the demands of capital accumulation and the real human needs of the people. The state is expected to fill this gap with compensation for injuries, welfare for those rejected by the labour market, physical and mental health institutions, and other programs for the poor, aged, natives, immigrants, handicapped, and so on. Ironically, since this money is spent by the poor on goods provided by large firms, these expenditures support the further accumulation of capital, which creates greater unemployment; and the state starts the wheel around again by providing unemployment insurance and encouraging the growth of more industry, usually controlled by large firms.



An abandoned grain elevator in Mullingar, Sask. The government sees its responsibility as making a few adjustments in the economy, not taking it over and changing it.

All these state services are really covering the hidden costs of industry. The state pays for them, yet because one of the original incentives was low taxes, the state does not share in the profit of the industry which created these expenses. It is a losing proposition and the state has to go into debt. Who holds most of the debt? The banks, trust companies and other large firms which, together with their industrial and mining allies, caused the problem in the first place.

This is called "the welfare state". To fill its role as the guarantor of continuity and stability, the state provides services and money to the casualties of the industrial system. But it can also find cheaper ways to handle expressions of dissatisfaction. The state can also use police and military power against its own people to insure stability and create "a good climate for investment". Chile and Brazil are among many examples of this choice. Outright violence and suppression have been much rarer in Canada, and at the moment this seems a remote option. However, historian Kenneth McNaught, in an article called "Violence in Canadian History", says: "Between 1867 and 1914 there were at least thirty-three interventions in strikes by the military." He goes on to list the significant acts of violence against workers since 1914: the army was sent to Winnipeg in 1919, where without provocation the police shot men dead in the streets; in 1923, 1924 and 1925 the army was sent to "keep peace" during strikes in Cape Breton, where wages had been slashed by one-third, and again the police killed a striker; in 1935 the "On-to-Ottawa Trekkers" were met by the RCMP in Regina and dispersed with excessive violence.

The state is under pressure to foster investment and to assure stability, either through repression or welfare programs. This is not to say that the state has no authority or independence to refuse to dance to this tune. Some states have decided to step out to a greater or lesser extent. But the drift of the state is towards the status quo, to back those who already have power; and it takes concerted pressure to change this.

There is another reason for the state's support of the corporations. People who hold high positions in

the state apparatus are often the very same persons who play prominent roles in corporations: they can easily switch back and forth between politics and business. Mitchell Sharp, once Secretary of the large multinational corporation Brascan, became Minister for External Affairs and then went back to the Board of Directors of Brascan. Otto Lang, after undermining the Wheat Board as a Cabinet Minister, became Vice-President of Pioneer Grain Company. Beryl Plumtre, who defended supermarket profits as head of the Food Prices Review Board, later joined the Board of Directors of Dominion Stores.

In fact, people at the middle and upper levels of public service tend to move easily back and forth between government and private enterprise. A number of years ago the government adopted an exchange program between civil servants and executives in private companies. It doesn't take a conspiracy for these people to agree with one another. As a farmer in Ardmore, Alberta, said: "What we have in government now are the guys who have the money. We are dealing with people in the higher category. They go from the point of view of business."

Because people employed by the state are often oriented towards the particular logic of the existing system, they are more open to the lobbies of business groups than they are to those of people's organizations. Doris Shackleton's book, *Power Town: Democracy Discarded*, tabled in Edmonton, describes how lobbying works to influence state decision-making bodies. Funds go to political parties, organizations meet with politicians, lobbyists representing corporate interests have close links with senior civil servants. It all tends to work with a slick precision. On the other hand, groups representing the poor, native peoples or other less "high-powered" bodies can spend weeks telephoning a minister's office and never get past the secretary. The influence of business-oriented, "well-cushioned" lobbies is another means by which the state tends to serve capital accumulation rather than human needs.

Again, this is not to say that action aimed at influencing the government is hopeless. (The next chapter will consider ways in which some groups are using state structures to bring about change.) Nor are we suggesting that there should be no state. But those who do choose to work through the state should keep in mind its basic orientation — support for the food system the way it is. If we want a basic change in the orientation of the food system — from serving profit to serving people — we will have to shift the basic orientation of the state as well.

But in spite of all the evidence people gave us that the state tends to support those who own and accumulate capital at the expense of local economic health and control of food supplies, the very same persons continue to look to the government to make the food system fill their need for healthy, affordable food and for secure incomes in the form of jobs.

In Vancouver, Betty Briggs suggested we unite against the provincial health department to correct what she called a situation of improper nutrition in Vancouver hospitals. Many groups wanted the government to police the advertising of non-nutritious food. John Murchie suggested at the Vancouver hearing that the government fund a People Watching Prices Board. Peggy Hope-Simpson, speaking in Halifax, said something that we heard often across the country: "I am asking that the People's Food Commission request the various government levels to provide monetary and research support for sustainable agriculture, which uses renewable energies and organic wastes." Pollution Probe in Toronto suggested: "The government has the responsibility to improve food quality regulations and safeguard public health." Domini Stewart in Kamloops called for the federal government to "restrict the amount of fresh fruit and vegetable imports into Canada". The Green Mountain Food Co-op in Nanaimo, B.C. is only one of many groups which asked that "the government provide school teachers with lesson aids on sound nutrition".

There is, then, a contradiction between what people expect the government to do and what their own stories say the government actually does do.

It is necessary for the state to be involved in the food system. It must regulate imports and exports; set up and enforce health standards; test new substances for safety; subsidize necessary services, such as rail transportation; enable producers to set up marketing agencies. People expect the state to carry out these actions on their behalf. But in fact, as the

Dining at the St. Paul's Cafeteria, Saskatoon. Ironically, hospitals are becoming known for poor nutrition.

submissions to the Commission well illustrate, the state uses these kinds of programs to discourage a decentralized, self-sufficient food system that meets the needs of as many people as possible; and instead supports those who own and are accumulating more capital. Why do people continue to expect the state to be on their side?

Corporate Responsibility

The stories told to the Commission, as we've seen, indicate that the corporations operating in the food system make their decisions in order to make more profit — not to provide a healthy, nutritious product or to improve the quality of life for their employees. Christine Sinclair in Vancouver perhaps summed it up best: "Corporations are far more concerned with shelf life than human life."

Some people have gone "back to the land" as a solution to food problems.

Yet, despite this clear lack of interest in human well-being, many persons were asking the industry to improve the situation. Caroline Gartenburg told us in Kingston: "We must put pressure on governments and food-related corporations to look seriously at the effects that their policies are having on the ability of people to feed themselves and to change those policies if necessary."

Donna Aldous of the Catholic Women's League in Meadow Lake, Sask., said, "Why can't our food stores make a direct turnabout face and start helping the consumer? We will all acknowledge the fact that a little more information on nutrition and smart buying and shopping practices would be very useful — and our grocery stores could lead the way in this type of consumer education. For example, breakfast cereals: put the nutritious cereals at eye level and on the easy-to-reach ledges, while the sugar-coated junk food could go on the top shelf where you would have to reach to get it."

Personal Self-Sufficiency

An important contradiction emerged between those who felt that individual action and personal self-sufficiency would reverse the trend of centralized control by corporations, and those who said that individual action only separates us and makes us ineffective in the struggle to gain control over what we eat and where we work. Personal self-sufficiency — feeling good about who you are and what you do; not feeling utterly dependent upon some outside force for permission to act autonomously, and to contribute to the community — is an absolute essential for human well-being. The problem that emerged in the hearings concerns how to achieve this goal, rather than the goal itself. Some persons felt they have achieved this goal by themselves, despite the society that surrounds them; others argued that this goal can be achieved only through collective action that would bring fundamental changes to our society.

At the Chilliwack hearing, Gayle Ladd spoke eloquently for those who believe that individual self-sufficiency will change the system:

> I'm a big-city girl turned country girl, and have managed a small herd of goats for almost six years. The rattling of milk pails at the same time each day has given my life a calming rhythm. Moreover, I delight in being part of a revolution, admittedly a quiet, backstage part. Growing a backyard garden, tending chickens and milking a family cow or goat are, in a sense, acts of

political defiance. Less reliance on supermarkets to feed us and increased self-sufficiency lead to more and more control over our lives.

Those who spoke for the other side of this question argued that the strategy of the powerful corporations, in their bid to take control over our food system, is exactly to keep us individual and therefore separated in our opposition against them. Bev Burke, speaking from the floor in Ottawa, argued that since our society has set us against one another, individual action without careful consultation between classes and sectors often serves only to hurt other victims of the system.

The differing opinions about individual action gave rise to many intense discussions at hearings and meetings. For instance, at an energy workshop in Humboldt, Sask., Ewen Coxworth, a discussion leader, said: "Change only comes from the individual. . . . We must help ourselves individually, then others will come around. . . . The most you can do is set an example." A young farmer replied, "But where does this individual direction get us in the long run? Does it get us more control over our destiny? We need to maintain a process of discussion and pressure for a national energy policy."

"We Do It All To You"

What came out of the hearings is that there is a "circle of blame", much of it centring on the consumer. The sense of blame comes both from people who see themselves primarily as consumers as well as from those who see themselves as farmers, fishermen or workers. The consumer is often seen as overdemanding, unthinking, willing to pay any amount for luxuries but constantly ready to complain if food prices rise.

This kind of finger-pointing at consumers is based, we are sure, on the belief that the consumer rules the system; that the food industry exists to serve consumers and will change to meet whatever demands consumers make.

Stella Blair in Ottawa told us: "If you change demand, you change the supply." And we had a similar message from Fabian Gross in Windsor: "The consumer must change his buying practices, and insist on local produce whenever it is available. . . . If the Canadian consumer by his buying habits indicates his willingness to pay more for imported products in fancy packages, [the companies] will be only too glad to oblige. Therefore, in the end, it is the housewife who determines whether in fact the Canadian vegetable farmer survives or disappears or even what he shall produce in the future." And James Friel told us in Saskatoon: "If enough customers start asking for homegrown vegetables, the message to the retailer will soon be passed to the wholesaler."

Marjorie Ross and Patricia Hancock of Toronto said "The fact remains that the food industry is still just that — an industry, out to attract customers, to sell products and to make profits." The woman as consumer is the one the industry particularly wants to attract, they said. "She is the one it needs. . . . She must not lose sight of the power that is hers as a consumer. . . . Her influence can and should be felt just as strongly as the most vocal lobby if she recognizes the power she has and uses it responsibly."

This belief in the power of the consumer is fundamental to our society. When people speak about Canada being a "free country", this is largely what they mean. The assumption that the state will act on people's behalf is based on this belief: political theorists constantly make the comparison between democracy and the market; voters, like consumers, are sovereign, and the system must meet their demands. Often it is because of this belief that people think that personal self-sufficiency is enough: once citizen-consumers know exactly what it is they want, they will be able to demand it of our democracy-market.

On the other hand, despite these expectations concerning consumer demand, what do people's

Food has come to be viewed by the industry as raw material for the manufacturing process.

stories tell us? Do consumers, through their demand, control the food industry? We have several pieces of evidence which say no. First is the general story about people whose needs are not filled by the food system, in spite of their letters, electioneering, petitions and organizations. Even when their demand for good, locally-produced food is clearly expressed, the food system remains deaf. Then there is the evidence, discussed in Chapter Three, about advertising. The food companies spend millions of dollars in their efforts to manipulate consumer demand towards things **they** want to sell. If, then, consumers organize and demand other things, the reaction of the companies is not simply to give consumers what they demand, but to redirect their advertising in order to defuse and deflect the organized consumers. For instance, as food prices rise sharply and consumer resistance grows, we do not find that prices level off; we find instead that the large chains redouble their advertising efforts and talk in the ads of how "low" their prices are.

The Commission even received some clear evidence of supply forcing demand. In Chapter One we quoted part of the testimony by Ron Christie in London, Ont., talking about the choice made just after the Second World War to grow corn instead of alfalfa for feeding beef. In another submission, presented in Alberta, reference to a 1977 article in the *New Times* magazine showed that this choice was deliberately made and foisted on farmers. The chemical companies had large stockpiles of nitrogen left from explosives manufacturing and wanted to market it as fertilizer. They began a concentrated campaign to convince the government departments of agriculture and the agricultural schools that they should be pushing corn. As Ron Christie said, "Corn, corn, corn. For twenty-five years they've been pushing corn," even though using alfalfa, which fixes nitrogen in the soil and can be planted once and harvested for five years, would have meant a saving on machinery, energy and the health of the soil.

And, when it comes later to products being on sale, as we've also seen in Chapter One, consumers have little choice about where they shop, or what they can buy when they get there.

All this evidence leads to the conclusion that the food industry has learned how to control consumer demand effectively, to the point where consumers have little influence through their choice of purchase.

Some might say that we have painted so bleak a picture that there seems to be no way out. We would reply that there are still ways out, but it is important not to confuse them with blind alleys. Certainly organizing is crucial; but in order to organize, people must learn to tell the difference between their friends and their enemies. The contradictions which we have outlined seem to say that people get their friends and enemies confused, turning for aid to those (such as large firms or government agencies) whose interests are against theirs, and distrusting and blaming those who are their potential allies. Consumers and farmers, especially, sometimes see each other in opposition, when in fact they are suffering the same difficulties at the hands of the dominant food corporations, who see them **both** as consumers. How is it possible for people to come to see things in such a way that they miss their potential allies, and hand themselves over to their enemies?

Vision and Action

Some clever person once remarked that while he didn't know who it was who discovered water, he was sure it wasn't a fish. Water is a fish's environment, what it sees through, what it breathes; it is the last thing it will notice. The most important things in our world are like water to a fish, or like air to a human being. These things keep us alive, keep us together as people, keep us in line, keep us healthy or bruised and angry. But it takes great leaps of the imagination for us to notice them at all. Some of the institutions that help to shape our beliefs are like this. As time goes by, these institutions and the beliefs they reinforce surround us like a wall, until we can't see past them and certainly can't imagine removing them. Here, we would like to examine briefly five of these institutions: the state, churches, family, schools and news media.

In what we've seen so far of the role of the state in the food system, it is clear that the state's basic orientation is to reinforce the current trends. One more example of this is the fact that the various government agencies have enormous facilities for disseminating information to farmers, to fishermen, to workers, to consumers. These agencies not only set policy by their actions, but also are in a position to persuade us of their point of view simply by flooding us with information.

Again, this is not to say that everything about state agencies is bad. In fact, one of the very real complexities of life is that there are many people working in government departments who are trying to change policies, trying to halt or even to reverse the current trends. But these allies, unfortunately, are swimming upstream. The institutional drift of state agencies is to reinforce current trends, and to persuade the rest of us that these trends are "the way things are" — and the way things ought to be.

There is, we have found, a similar ambiguity

within the network of Canadian churches. At almost every hearing, church groups made serious, thoughtful presentations, often calling for basic changes in the present food system. In the past ten years, in fact, there have been several interchurch groups and projects which have focussed on specific issues, bringing documented, reasoned arguments to bear on public policy debates. For instance, GATT-fly has focussed on international trade issues; Project North has "stood beside the Native Peoples" as they have argued for a settlement of their land claims and a fair chance to preserve their identity; the Task Force on the Churches' and Corporate Responsibility has monitored the investment policies of major Canadian corporations; there has been an Interchurch Committee for Human Rights in Latin America; and an interchurch committee arguing for a non-racist and equitable population policy for Canada; an interchurch group called Ten Days for World Development carries on a program to educate church people about the relationship of Canada to the Third World; the Saskatchewan Conference of the United Church has taken a stand against Plant Breeders' Rights, which has brought it criticism from a small but vocal group promoting private breeders' rights. Each of these groups is motivated by that stream of the Christian tradition which maintains that justice is at the heart of the biblical message.

However, there is another stream within the churches' tradition that says religion is not about worldly matters. This tradition would have the churches concentrate on the spiritual concerns of their members. Many of those people who benefit from the present system consider themselves Christians, and try to influence the churches towards a "non-interventionist" stance. Sometimes these people have considerable influence because they can be helpful in the churches' quest for financial stability. For instance, prominent members of the business community such as Conrad Black (chairman of Argus Corporation, which controls Dominion Stores and Massey-Ferguson among other properties), Stephen Roman (chairman of Denison Mines) and John Turner (former federal Minister of Finance, now a director on the boards of several major corporations) are on the Board of Trustees of the Toronto School of Theology, a major educator of clergy for four mainline churches. These men are in a position to influence the educational program of that school.

Often, those who think the churches should stay out of economic affairs simply neutralize the churches' impact. For instance, when spokespersons for the Task Force on Churches' and Corporate Responsibility spoke to a shareholders' meeting of the Bank of Nova Scotia and criticized that bank's South African and Chilean investments, another shareholder identifying himself as a lifelong member of the church took the floor and denied that the Task Force spoke for the rank and file of the churches. Often too, because the church leaders are conscious of their responsibility to maintain unity within the church, they are reluctant to speak out strongly on economic or political issues (even when they are convinced of their importance) because they do not want to provoke dissension. And often church leaders are genuinely more concerned about "spiritual" matters and know little about economic or political issues.

The net result is that the weight of the main body of the churches tends to remain dead centre, on the fence, and does not counterbalance the thrust of the "business as usual" message.

Then There's the Family Structure

Children first find out about their world from their parents. But there are outside pressures that come to children through their parents. Over several generations, as people have been drawn into the city by the promise of easier living and better jobs, or been simply forced out of dying rural communities, connections with larger families — with aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, as well as with adult brothers and sisters — have been lost. The nuclear family — mother, father, children — is isolated. Often people must move from familiar surroundings to new places in search of jobs. Often both parents must work in order to make ends meet.

As corporations cut costs, people may have to do

A Hutterite family selling produce at the Saskatoon Farmers' Market.

more work in a day, or lose their jobs altogether. Their income does not always meet their expenses. Going into debt takes its toll. Poor food deteriorates the health of both parents and children. Some food, such as sugar, can cause depression.

In other words, the trends identified in the Commission's inquiry (and outlined in Chapter Two) place enormous pressures on families today. Here are the thoughts of a woman in Dawson Creek, B.C., at a meeting called to talk about food:

> You have to talk about incomes and that means socio-economic conditions and the problems of individual human beings. You can't keep up. You end up in Dawson Creek because your husband got a job here. There's no money for child care so there's no opportunity to leave the home. So we cook the meals and take care of the children and have very little contact with other adults. Your husband comes home drunk and dissatisfied with his job. Everything is so temporary. Wife-battering and child-battering are very common here in Dawson Creek.

The pressures on parents get through to the children, who may not get as much love and support as they should. Children learn to a greater or lesser degree the arts of isolation, silence, competition and manipulation. They become susceptible to the logic of the system, open to accepting the present social and economic realities as inevitable, and open to the dreams that advertising holds out to them.

People also often pointed to schools as part of the problem: whether grade schools that use a nutrition text put out by McDonald's, with the golden arch on every page; or medical schools that do not teach students about the relation between food and health; or agricultural schools that teach intensive, "factory" agriculture.

Agriculture in the machine age — University of Saskatchewan School of Agriculture.

In Ottawa, Lorna Birnbaum raised the question indirectly. She tabled a complete nutrition curriculum which she has been trying to introduce in the Ottawa school system for years. She is turned down everywhere she goes.

Sister Marie Burge raised the question much more directly in Charlottetown. Children, she told us, are "educated off the land". The P.E.I. Development Plan, in effect since 1969, says, in Sister Burge's words, "You must rationalize education in order to rationalize agriculture. . . . The consolidation of education and the consolidation of the land have gone hand in hand."

It is not simply a matter of curriculum, but of the climate in the school everyday. Bonnie Greene told the Toronto hearing just how the school affected her small Ontario village:

> Early in my stay in that village some of the older men told me the problem with farming these days was all those over-educated teachers in the high school, At first I thought it was a joke, but later it became apparent that that **was** part of the problem. People who had no roots in the community but who had come to get any job they could were known to tell the kids they needn't set high standards for themselves because they were just hicks. Although the school in the nearest town had a showcase vocational program, it ignored agriculture entirely, not even offering an orientation to farm equipment.
>
> There were other subtle messages as well. In a home economics class, girls were asked to design their first house with these givens: they are twenty-two years old, married to a doctor, a lawyer, a veterinarian, or an engineer, and they have unlimited funds. The girls created beautiful houses, of course, the like of which were owned only by the wealthy city people who cottaged in the area. It occurred to a few girls that the assignment assumed they would go away from the farm, make it into the 'good life' by marrying a 'professional' who would have to live in the city or the suburbs if he wished to work. Farm organizations for kids [such as 4H] give a very different message, but they didn't touch everyone and the powerful influence of an urban-oriented school program is almost overwhelming.
>
> I'm not saying that anyone set about demoralizing rural kids or deliberately training them to leave home. It's just that no one was questioning the assumption that urban centralization was the only way for Ontario to

go or that progress in the agricultural community meant a declining population, fewer jobs in the country, and the flight of the young to the city.

This is an example of how our educational system supports and defends — simply by presenting as "facts" — the dominant trends of the food system. As Sister Burge put it: "There is not much room in our educational system for any questions about the direction of our economic system. If you . . . even insinuate that there is any question, you get panic on your hands. . . . I've had this said: 'We survive because of the free enterprise system. Therefore we have to promote it.' And it is promoted in concrete ways. All you have to do is look at the curriculum."

There is no deep, dark conspiracy to create a school system that teaches children the "logic of the system", but schools back "progress" and avoid controversy, and therefore end up adopting a general attitude of support for the trends which are taking place around us. The picture of reality formed during childhood shapes tastes and values, and forms a strong foundation for adult thinking.

Then, when children grow up, the same tastes and values are continually reinforced by most of the available sources of information — the newspapers, television, magazines, radio and films.

The media are perhaps the most obvious way this point of view — belonging first to those who benefit from the present system and who most control it — filters into our families, influencing both our children and ourselves. The media bring us entertainment, news and advertising. Of these advertising was most often mentioned to the Commission (we've reported on those comments both in Chapters One and Three). It is important to note that, with the exception of the CBC, the media are businesses — often part of large corporate empires — which make their money largely by selling ads. It is naïve to expect ads to be critical of anything done by those who order them or who sell them. And it would be equally naïve to expect entertainment provided by the media (whether the sitcoms on TV or the sports pages in the newspaper) to be critical: its only function is to attract viewers or readers so that the ads will be more effective (and expensive).

However, it doesn't seem so far-fetched to expect that "news" be different. Journalists, it is usually thought, are hardworking, honest and proud to remain independent of the editorial biases of their bosses. Besides, the CBC, as a main source of news in Canada, has no rich businessmen pushing it around.

As most journalists put it, they are after "hard news". They leave the "philosophy" to somebody else. But this means that despite the often scandalous facts they dig up — and they work hard to dig them up — their role ends up being basically conservative. The problem, it seems, is that the news — especially on TV and the radio — has become merchandise, offered up in highly concentrated doses (on the air, for instance, in twenty-second clips). Even though a reporter might often dig up facts that give evidence of how badly dissatisfied the system leaves people, reporters usually don't have, or take, time to pull those facts together, to raise serious questions about the system as a whole. If people complain, for example, about the high price of food, that becomes the single question journalists pursue.

Sheep, a prime learning resource of the Animal Science Dept., University of Saskatchewan.

With each of the institutions we have looked at, the story is similar: in each there are hardworking, responsible, often critical people. But the drift of the institutions themselves, as part of the system, is to reinforce that system, largely by beaming the message at us from the time we are tiny children: this is the way it is; it isn't all that bad; it is irresponsible to want to change it.

The Belief Wall

There is, then, this feeling of being surrounded. We are bombarded with ads, urging us to consume the least nutritious foods, and assuring us that these colourfully packaged, convenient bits of junk are what make us an affluent society. When we do buy these foods, the indications are that the additives in them, especially the sugar, are addictive. So our own bodily cravings are part of what surrounds us. And even if we want to buy more wholesome food or locally-grown food, we find ourselves — especially if we live in the suburbs — with no place to shop but supermarkets, so we are even physically surrounded. And now we see people are surrounded by a wall of messages — a "belief wall" — as well.

Further, the "belief wall" says that our community is the most affluent, most healthy in the

world. Therefore, when people feel dissatisfied, they often conclude not that the system is wrong, but that they themselves (or some other group — the farmers, the workers, the consumers) are at fault. This, we believe, is the root cause of the conflicting opinions about who is to blame; and the cause for the even more puzzling contradictions between people's stories (based on their own experience) and people's suggestions for action (based on their beliefs and expectations).

It was surprising the number of people who told the Commission that the food system is not providing them with healthy, available food, but who then turned around to defend the logic of the system. People, it seems, get talked out of their own immediate, concrete experience. The stories they told the Commission should be our foothold in reality. The hunger of the poor, the heartbreak of the farmer going under, the illnesses and behavioural problems caused by additives — these constitute a reality more important that the "trends" and "efficiencies" and "productivity" which seem to concern economists and politicians. People's personal needs and interests are the crucial human reality. The system's economic needs — to maximize profit, to concentrate the market, to accumulate capital — should be secondary, should serve the personal needs of human beings — if indeed those particular economic needs are to be allowed to survive at all.

On the other hand, the testimony gathered suggests that many people — including those who suffer hunger and heartbreak — downplay the validity of their own experience, their own personal needs, in favour of the larger "outside" demands on their lives. They have been schooled to accept that if they have problems, they themselves are the ones responsible, rather than the outside forces. This can lead to confusion about who is a potential ally and who is an enemy: almost by default people have come to accept an externally-imposed system's objectives and needs as their own, and so feel threatened by any persons or groups who criticize

HOW FARMERS SEE THEMSELVES

At the Commission hearing in Langenburg, Saskatchewan, the audience saw a film made by the American Agriculture Movement. These comments are from a commissioner's notes, made during the film:

The film was sponsored by White Farm Equipment and General Motors. In the introduction, the representative of White Farm Equipment talked about farmers as his "partners in business". No distinction was made between a farmer with one hundred acres and a huge multinational conglomerate — they are all businesses. Consumers were referred to as "our customers", although the White Farm representative also repeated several times that consumers wanted farmers to produce at a loss. The film recognizes no steps in the food system between the farmer and the consumer.

Food is treated as just another commodity — all comparisons are with the automobile industry.

Later, the Commission read a letter from Brewster Kneen, a sheep farmer in Nova Scotia. He says:

On the ideological side is the phenomenon that was a thorn in my side for much of last year as I participated in discussions in farm organizations and tried to fathom what it was that made me uneasy. Superficially it was the fact that farmers try to use the language of business, and describe themselves as businessmen. Now in one sense this is an appropriate description in that one cannot come out on the debit side year after year and keep on farming, unless the government backs the enterprise through increasing loans, as we do with some Third-World countries because we want to protect our investments. But when farmers use the word "profit" they are really meaning something to live on after operating costs are paid. Why are farmers so confused?

I was, myself, in a bit of a quandary as to the roots of this confusion until I got a long letter from a friend who had been working with farmers forming the Peasant Opposition League which has been working against the Narita International Airport in Japan for more than thirteen years. It was in reading her first-hand account of this that the light first dawned, and I realized that the issue was one of fundamental identity. Farmers are workers, not businessmen. Their mentality is different. Yet North American culture looks down on workers, and farmers are "taught" not to demean themselves by insisting that they are farmers, but rather to elevate themselves by regarding themselves as businessmen or managers. In doing so, they cut themselves off from all those with whom they should really be in solidarity and join ranks with their oppressors.

But are farmers really workers, as Brewster Kneen says, or are they businesspeople? Jack Warnock, B.C. commissioner and orchardist, writes:

Most of them are workers. But if you look at farm production figures in Canada, you will see that the top five per cent of farmers produce most of the country's food (by cash value). These are the businessmen farmers, usually integrated into agribusiness. Ten years from now, they may be the only commercial farmers left in Canada, given the trends.

Farmers are likely, Warnock says, to identify more with the interests of agribusiness than with the ideological position of a group like the National Farmers Union:

The big farmers I know, aside from cattle producers a couple of years ago, are doing very well. A sixty-head dairy farm in the Fraser Valley now goes for $750,000. A grain cattle spread near Courtenay is up for $1.25 million. Poultry farms are going, around twenty acres with quota, for around $300,000. These prices are not only due to land speculation, but to a recognition that this kind of farming is doing quite well. Even the small farmers around here have very strong petit bourgeois class positions, and would never think of themselves as workers. The workers are their hired hands.

that system, instead of recognizing allies who are articulating shared needs.

This, then, is how the Commission accounts for the circle of blame that it encountered, and for the contradiction between people's stories and their suggestions, beliefs and expectations. Most of us, when we are simply telling what has happened personally, can be straight, accurate, clear. But when it comes to "explaining" what has happened, to "interpreting" experience in the light of the whole system and its logic, we tend to rely on what the system has told us. We have been talked out of our own experience.

This leads, then, to acknowledgement of one further irony embedded in the food system:

• You would expect all of us to be well aware of our basic needs and be quick to complain when those needs are not met. Instead, in many of us, the basic contradiction in the system gets shored up by an internalized contradiction: we accept the demands of the system as being more important than our own needs, because of the constant messages beamed at us by the surrounding institutions.

United We Stand

Because many people have come to accept that their problems are their own responsibility, they feel isolated; and this leads to a sense of powerlessness. The Commission found direct illustrations of this. For instance, in Cold Lake, Alberta, some farmers who came to the Commission hearings spoke forcefully against the construction of an Imperial Oil tarsands plant in their region. But a few weeks later, some of these same farmers went to a government hearing and testified that they did not oppose the plant. Later we discovered that they had accepted the inevitability of the plant and decided that their best course was to push for measures that might reduce its impact on the surrounding area.

This is the most common symptom of the feeling of powerlessness — a sense that the trends are not only damaging but inevitable. Some people said it to us directly. During a discussion in Ardmore, Alta., one farmer said, "We don't really participate because when we do participate it doesn't really make any difference. . . . What's the point of going to government hearings? . . . If we go to these hearings, in the long run it's not going to make any difference anyway." Another farmer at the same hearing said, "You go to one meeting and you realize that you're pounding your head against a brick wall. . . . Nothing really happens. . . . Why bother going?"

And Tom Reddin told us in Charlottetown: "The farmers, the fishermen, a lot of the housewives I know are aware that their food dollar does not go into the P.E.I. economy as much as they would like it to, but they are also aware of the fact that they can't do anything about it."

Jean Fairholm of the Ottawa Learner's Centre at the hearing in Ottawa.

Many persons, then, see no point in fighting. Many also reject the idea that there is something basically wrong with the present system. Many are not willing to think about a food system geared to meet people's needs rather than profit, because they think it impossible. They are willing to talk only about minor adjustments. In Chilliwack, B.C., Tom Hinkle commented at the end of his presentation on those who give up:

> We can expect the multinationals to look on the positive side of a presentation such as mine in hopes that it will scare the hell out of everybody, that everyone will say, "The corporations are too big, too powerful. What can I do? People are evil; let me head for the hills. I don't want to think about it." Because that is exactly what the multinationals want us to do: to give up and crawl under the nearest rock. Then they can laugh all the way to the bank while the world starves.

J.K. Chegwin of Swan River, Manitoba, also threw a challenge to people who feel powerless. He said: "It's time we stopped looking at what we can do and look at what we should do."

Nobody, we are convinced, can break out of their "belief wall" and look at what must be done if they are isolated and alone. The most hopeful sign about the Commission and its process is the number of people who have decided to speak out about their own needs. By coming together in informal meetings and hearings, people discovered that they were not the only ones suffering, and this has given them the support to speak out, to begin acting.

When people hear others say, "The food system is not letting us get what we need; our needs are more important than the economic needs of the system; something has to be done," they start to recognize that they have allies. This can be true even if their lives are quite different — whether farmers, fishermen, people working in processing plants, people driving trucks, pensioners or single parents. They begin to see that there is a similar source for each set of problems: those who own capital are out to accumulate more by squeezing extra profit from the agribusiness system. They join with others working to change the basic nature of the system that produces and distributes our food.

But even after people start demanding better service from the food system, it still takes some time for them to see how the problem grows out of the basic organization of the food system itself. That's partly because of the influence of the "belief wall": people can often see the problems, but continue to think of the basic economic system as being all right. It takes some determined sifting and sorting to see, first, what solutions are influenced by the continuing belief that the overall system works well, needing only minor adjustments; and, secondly, what solutions might go to the roots of the problems and reorient the way food is produced and delivered.

Ernie Ross, speaking at the Ottawa hearing.

5 Seeds of Change: The Future and Food

THE COMMISSION heard just as much about the ways people would like things to be — their dreams, if you like — as the problems they have with the way things work in the food system. And one of the notes that marked a great number of people's submissions was an expressed desire for responsibility and control over their own destinies. Another was the desire to do satisfactory, creative work which would contribute to the well-being of others as well as themselves. The question that arises in terms of the food system is, then, what do we want? What would a food system designed to fill our needs rather than the demands of profit look like?

One of the ways people attempted to answer this question was by appealing to concepts such as self-reliance and sustainable agriculture. Self-reliance, as a goal, is sometimes branded as quaint romanticism, self-centredness, or provincialism. As suggested in Chapter Four, while there might be some question about trying to seek self-reliance as an individual goal, just the fact of the search in itself can reflect a deep insight, one that many people have reached through separate experiences involving a loss of control over the food system.

But it should also be understood that this drive for a personal or familial self-sufficiency (by, for instance, starting a subsistence farm) can be a highly limited act. While it takes a high degree of integrity or courage on the part of the people who make this move, it is basically an individualistic understanding of self-sufficiency. And it can easily — in the long run — bolster the myth of hardy individuals making their way through a hostile market environment. At a more technical level, subsistence farming or gardening in such a highly urbanized society cannot,

because of low productivity levels, make so much as a dent in the corporate-controlled framework of the food system.

As well, there is another important ambiguity lurking within the goal of self-reliance — the fact that self-reliance has for centuries been associated in our society with ownership. This is a tendency which has for many generations kept farmers from uniting. It is bound up with the feeling most farmers have of "independence" coming through ownership, a feeling that often prevents them from seeing that they are controlled and exploited by the same large firms which exploit workers in plants and stores (though through different mechanisms). This fear of losing their independence turns into a reason for not organizing to regain control of the market.

This can be true as well of fishermen. Two of the commissioners visited a co-operative fish plant in Chetticamp, N.S., where they spoke with plant workers, with the crew of a boat owned by a co-op, and with a fisherman who owns a boat but is a co-op member. What struck the commissioners was the pride of all these workers — not just of the man who operates his own boat. It is possible for people to achieve a sense of who they are, of being their own person, without this sense of individual ownership. They can also achieve this goal by working together.

Breaking the Chemical Fix

To many people involved in agriculture, part of being self-sufficient means less dependence upon chemical agriculture. But those who consider our present use of chemicals in agriculture to be dangerously high, or who see dangerously high levels of energy being used up in food production, are often branded as health food faddists, ecofreaks or kooks. At the same time, some researchers say that if we tried to return to organic agriculture, we would face skyrocketing food costs and widespread famine.

The commissioners spoke to people in the fishing industry at Chetticamp, N.S.

CO-OPS

For many people who spoke with the Commission, co-ops are an alternative which has provided some control over the food system. A brief from Don Mitchell in Regina clarified some of the different kinds of co-ops. Below are some excerpts from that brief, interspersed with quotes and observations from other parts of the country.

Co-operative Capitalism

The major co-operatives, such as Federated Co-operatives, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, and Co-operative Insurance Services, are agencies of co-operative capitalism. They grew from an agrarian strategy of resistance in the market-place to the power of external monopoly capital, and represented a local pooling of capital to provide alternative service institutions and substantial consumer savings for farmers. They represented not an alternative to capitalism, but rather a more democratic expression of capitalism since they were local and regional and subject to the collective will of their member shareholders. They at no point entertained the objective of pooling labour as a central objective in order to alter the conflict between wage-labour and capital.

As institutions of capital which employed wage-labour to carry out delivery of services, they were as any other employer. Indeed, they established early in their history a pathetic record of anti-union positions, aggressively resisting the employees' right to organize or to withdraw services.

Nor do co-operatives offer savings to urban consumers substantial enough to warrant consumer loyalties. Their "consumer savings" are in the bulk farm commodities purchased in volume, like fuel, lumber, fertilizer, machinery. These are the bases of the co-operative "movement's" integrated industrial strategy.

Production Co-operatives

A second form of co-operative is the "production co-operative" in which members pool both capital and labour, or "workers' co-operatives" in which labour is pooled and includes autonomous self-management as the basis of decision-making. These are approaches to reorganizing production relations and operating as alternative "islands" in a capitalist market economy. The production co-operative offers genuine advances to its production workers, provided they can survive and compete within the dominant capitalist stream. This model has much greater potential as a long range alternative to the private oligopoly in agribusiness or the enlarged "family" farm which is owned by a single entrepreneur but with a growing proportion of hired wage-labour.

Counter-Institution Co-ops

The third type of co-operative of great current interest is the voluntary labour "counter-institution" enterprise.

Bulk purchase, urban food co-operatives, day-care co-operatives, bookstores, and farmers' markets are the most common examples, and are rapidly expanding throughout North America. They have ideological and logical links to both the earlier forms. They pool capital but have little available and do not seek out profit or savings as a "primary" objective. They also pool labour but it is largely unpaid voluntary labour and therefore self-exploitive rather than a victim of "management" as the agent of capital trying to extract profit from wage-workers.

The driving motivation for these counter-institutions appears to be life-style and a political rejection of the corporate-run world and its supermarkets, its price manipulations, and its declining quality and service. In some cases such as day-care, the corporate world and the state simply may not be providing the service. As these co-operatives grow in support they will be faced with the choice of perhaps becoming an imitation of the traditional large co-operatives, pooling their capital and hiring wage-labour to provide a service and saving to their loyal base of consumer members. In doing so they will inevitably be forced to exploit their workers in order to gain advantage over their larger corporate rivals. (This has always been the co-ops' dilemma.) The alternative is to encourage and develop workers' co-operatives which can compete and survive on their own terms within the capitalist market-place. Such an alternative requires community or state ownership of capital assets and progressive concepts of autonomous self-management, such as are being attempted at the Churchill Park Greenhouse Co-operative.

Don Mitchell speaks about the choice which counter-institutions face as they grow larger. The Commission found that they face another choice even when they are very small. Some exist only to save money and improve the quality of food available to members. Others choose to be part of the political battle to change the overall food system. Here is someone talking about a food co-op which is beginning to move in that direction:

> Recently, some of us are recognizing that we are eating off the backs of the Third World and exploring ways to educate ourselves about this, through the help of GATT-fly and PFC. We may even have the courage to put a surcharge on Third World goods and funnel that extra money back to those organizations to help them carry on their educational work.
>
> — Angela Pritchard, 519 Co-op, Toronto, Ont.

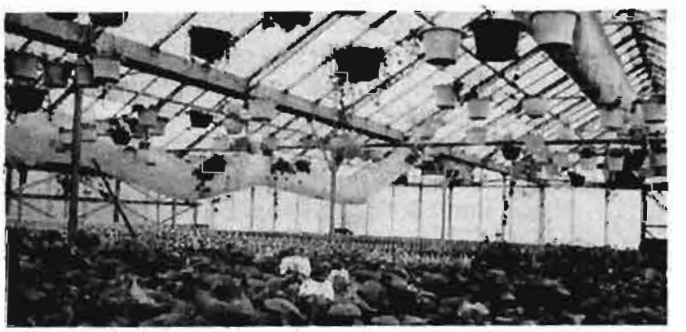
A limitation of small consumer co-ops is the difficulty of including people who most need the help. The small co-ops are organized by people who are often fairly well off, have access to cars, and are interested in alternative, natural foods. Co-ops organized by and for the poor are few and far between, and have huge hurdles to overcome. Members do not have cars, access to child care, or previous experience in organizing such ventures. Also, the poor are subject to messages telling them that they are dependent, incapable and their situation is their own fault. (The box on page 85 tells the story of a co-operative buying scheme which floundered over this problem.)

On the whole, however, co-operatives are a powerful tool for action and education. In a submission, Nelson Coyle of Ottawa, Ont., a former NFU researcher and now a research assistant to Saskatchewan M.P. Lorne Nystrom, said he sees co-ops as a possible beginning for a national movement to take back control over the food system and form a new national food policy.

On the other hand, research has also indicated that it will be impossible to continue growing food the way we do. In its discussion paper, *Canadian Food and Agriculture: Sustainability and Self-Reliance*, the Science Council of Canada shows that many foods require, in their production, more energy than they provide in nourishment. The Council also points out that processing and packaging of food uses up seventy-seven per cent more energy than growing it, and transportation takes that much again. Clearly, our centralized, industrialized food system wastes energy. The question is how long will we be able to afford this waste of energy in the face of rising energy costs?

The other question is whether a return to organic agriculture would mean widespread starvation. The government and the chemical industry have put research money into chemical agriculture, but the practical side of ecological agriculture has been neglected. However, this much we do know: the present course will lead to disaster. We know this from the experience of tropical countries, where the process goes several times faster than in our climate. It is easier to see the soil erosion, increased use of pesticides to control stronger breeds of pests, and finally depletion of the soil in these areas. Besides, experiments in Holland, Canada and elsewhere show that well-managed organic farms are just as productive as energy-intensive and chemically-dependent farms.

Technically, organic farming seems feasible, even necessary. The real problem is one of political and economic control: the corporate system, which requires uniformity, cost controls and replacement of people with machines, will resist any turn towards alternative methods. Its drive to create new world markets, no matter what the real need for the product, would collide head-on with what the



Self-reliant farming — a necessity, but one that will clash with the drive of the corporate system for new world markets.

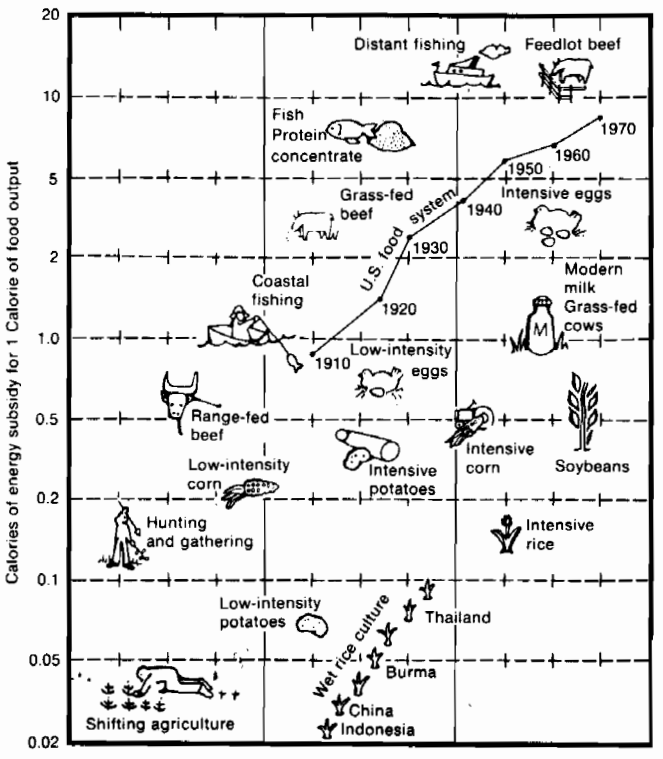
Science Council calls "frugality — the willingness to live within physical and social limits for the long-term benefit of all". And "frugality" is what we would have to be prepared for in an ecologically-balanced and self-reliant form of agriculture.

ENERGY USE IN THE FOOD SYSTEM, CANADA, 1975

Component	Percentage of total energy in the food system
Production	18
Processing, packaging	32
Transportation, distribution	20
Preparation (home)	30
Total	100

Source: Agriculture Canada, Food Systems Branch *Energy and the Food System*, Ottawa, December 1977.

Figure 4 — Energy Subsidies for Various Food Crops



Source: John S. Steinhart and Carol E. Steinhart, "Energy Use in the U.S. Food System", *Science*, Volume 184, p. 312.

The problem is a political one. Rather than admit to the demand for human health and a sound environment, industry and government insist that anything other than what we have now is technically and economically impractical, and that those who demand changes are irresponsible dreamers. The fact is that the interests benefitting from the present order of things try to set limits on what is possible for the rest of us.

Regional or National Self-Reliance

The multinational corporations say that those who want regional or national self-sufficiency are selfish. If you assume that what is to the advantage of one region or nation is automatically to the disadvantage of another, then the "selfish" label is legitimate. But this kind of profit-at-others'-expense exactly describes the world food system controlled by the corporations.

Since the market pits people against people, an objective like national self-sufficiency can easily be made to sound like a move on the part of some persons against those in other countries or regions. However, when self-sufficiency or self-reliance are understood in their proper sense — as a way of striving to become less dependent upon the corporations — the concepts can lead people in different places and roles to understand how similar their problems are at the root. The understanding can lead to interregional and international co-operation.

The Commission found examples of this. The National Farmers Union said that corporations play the farmers of one region off against those of another. According to the NFU, farmers recognize the need both for strength in each region and for a strong national organization to deal with their problems across the country. On the possibilities for co-operation on an international level, there was the example supplied by Darrell McLaughlin, a potato farmer in New Brunswick who along with some other Canadian farmers visited potato farmers in Bolivia in the winter of 1978-79. He wrote after his visit: "Comparing the underdevelopment of the Canadian Maritimes to that of Bolivia is like looking at two cancers, each having obvious differences, but having a common cause." In Bolivia, the Canadians had trouble at first, he said, because their hosts "did not believe that white people farmed, because for them members of the white race historically have been the masters or bosses. It was only through working with them and talking about the struggles of the farmers in Canada that we were accepted as farmers."

After comparing the problems of farmers in both countries, Darrell McLaughlin said, "I have come to realize that underdevelopment isn't simply a lack of capital, but a dependence planned and implemented by those driven by greed." He found one major difference between the two countries: farmers in

Canada are kept in place through economic dependence, farmers in Bolivia face naked military suppression.

The Canadians came away from their visit with the question of a Bolivian woman to ponder: "How can we the Bolivian farmers help you the Canadian farmers in your struggle for justice and how can you help us in our struggle?" During the summer of 1979, four Bolivian farmers visited New Brunswick to help figure out the answers to that basic question.

A different example of a Third World country's attempt to feed its people is the case of Mozambique. In a presentation to the Toronto hearing, OXFAM-Canada outlined some of the problems faced by that country since it became free of Portuguese colonial rule in June, 1975. "The colonial economy was structured around commercial agriculture for export to Portugal and the developed world." For example, from 1926 to independence African peasants in Mozambique had been forced to grow cotton if they were living in areas designated for "cotton growing".

"We must do what's being done in the tropics, return to traditional techniques and create a new ecological agriculture building on our present system."

FRELIMO, the ruling party in Mozambique since 1975, has adopted a new development strategy, the aim of which, according to OXFAM "is to create the foundation for a qualitative transformation of life in the rural areas and consequently society as a whole, rather than to encourage rural development as a source of economic surplus for urban industrial development." Canadian development, as we've seen has been the exact opposite: to push some farmers to ever higher productivity so there is surplus for the cities, and to push the rest of the farmers into the cities to become workers in industry.

In its push towards self-reliance, FRELIMO has established communal villages and trained "dynamizing groups" of local leaders to help people pull together both technically and politically after the generations of demoralization suffered under colonialism. This approach presents a significant contrast to the briefs the Commission received, some of which were quoted in Chapter Four, which told how the Canadian educational system educates children off the land, and often reinforces the image of rural people as hicks.

In its brief, OXFAM makes it clear that its aid to the rural people of Mozambique is aimed at helping them overcome the political and economic obstacles they face in their quest for self-reliance. This, again, is a position opposite to the rice broker we quoted, who wants such people "on their knees".

Canada is, of course, neither Bolivia nor Mozambique; and Canada's path to self-reliance will be different from theirs. But there are important lessons to be learned:

- Our quest for self-reliance need not come at the expense of other peoples. It is a quest to break free of dependence upon multinational corporations, a quest to be in a position to co-operate with other self-reliant peoples.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Biological management represents an intensive use of a given area just as with the conventional agricultural operations. Here, too, high yields are obtained, but by other means. The biologically managed garden or farm enterprise relies on a many-sided cropping system. Nitrogen-enriching legumes, other humus-encouraging plants, and the use of intercropping and green manuring, all raise the yields of cereals and row crops. Animal populations are geared to what the land itself can support. Feed is largely produced on the farm, and feeding aims at maintaining health and performance.

— Bio-dynamic Farming and Gardening Assoc., Chilliwack, B.C.

[By 1976] international agencies concerned with agricultural development in the tropics were beginning to implement "eco-development" policies because of the almost total failure of intensive agricultural systems in the tropics. . . . Is our situation different? We are fortunate we have a land of much more resiliency than in the tropics. But there is a danger in this, and that is that we delude ourselves that our agriculture is efficient, while all along the capital of our land is decreasing: capital in the soil, capital in oil, capital in rural social systems. And the further along this route we travel, the harder it becomes to withdraw. The pesticide companies are absolutely right when they say that to stop using pesticides would be a disaster. It would be. But not to stop using them would be too, so what we must go through is a gradual withdrawal. We must do as is being done in the tropics, to return to traditional techniques, and create a new ECOLOGICAL AGRICULTURE building upon our present system. This is not a step backwards; it is turning around and away from a precipice that could cause a dramatic crisis in our society's food supply system.

— Ecology Action Centre, Halifax, N.S.

• Despite all the present trappings of affluence, continued dependence upon the multinationals will probably lead to hunger for more Canadians.

• While the maze we are in sometimes seems to have no paths out, the very action and nature of forming links with people and groups in other classes, other sectors, other regions, other countries will almost always point the way.

Neither the People's Food Commission nor anyone else can tell how history is going to unfold. But we can learn from our own history as well as that of others, and we can engage in action to bring about meaningful change.

How Can We Get What We Want?

The basic struggle is over whose interests will be served by our food system: the interests of a few wealthy and powerful people who seek to accumulate capital; or the interests of people who want healthy food at reasonable prices. Right now, the few wealthy and powerful people have too much control over a resource that is necessary to all of us. Our task is to get back that control.

It's a tall order, and such basic change won't come all at once. We must work towards it in small steps. Here is where there is a distinction between effective action, and action that leads down blind alleys. Sometimes these are even the same actions. The difference lies more in the breadth of vision of the people acting.

One group can carry out a certain action and think of it only as a way to get some influence over the institutions which control food, or to correct one particular symptom of a sick food industry. They may not want to challenge the basic structure of the system at all. They may even support the "right" of private enterprise to own our food resources and use them for its own purposes. Another group may be involved in exactly the same action, but be using it as part of a larger strategy to educate people and move towards changing the underlying structure.

Blind Alley: The Corporations Should Do It

The Commission heard from people who are using

STAGES ALONG THE WAY

These [are the] feelings that are a reality among many of the people who are being introduced to the food issue through the educational program of the Ten Days for World Development — the initial feelings of anger that any questions are being raised about the existing systems and structures and that therefore this must be some socialist or communist plot and needs to be fought; then feelings of being threatened by so much information that is exploding some myths that have been a part of their thought structures for so long; feelings of not knowing whom or what to trust; feelings of guilt that somehow the whole problem rests on their shoulders; then feelings of another kind of anger (a more creative kind) that things should not be the way they are; and those sometimes overwhelming feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness to be able to do anything in the face of such powerful odds. The difficult-to-manage end result is one of feeling alone. For the person in the church, there is an added feeling of insecurity in terms of one's faith — how all this talk about the global food situation and a new economic order fits into one's faith.

These feelings are ones with which this educational program and we in particular in our committee have had to deal. It's important to say that these 'blocks' have not always been easy to identify or verbalize. It is easier to do that after looking back over three years on the food issue. However, it is fair, I believe, to say that we have at one time or another over this period of time worked to dispel these roadblocks and have been successful to a small degree. We are hopeful that people can begin to gain confidence in their ability to 'manage' change.

May I mention just a few methods we have to deal with these realities.

In order to help people get over the initial anger they feel and the feeling of being threatened by so much information, we have attempted each year to provide opportunities for in-depth study, principally through leadership workshops, special events, and co-sponsoring of world development seminars. In these events we have sought to help people understand that we're concerned to make systems work for people, for human needs, rather than against them....

The more people read on the issues of food and development the more seems to be being written on the topic. Gradually one becomes aware of a vast host of individuals concerned about the question and with that knowledge comes confidence in not being led astray and an assurance that one is not powerless when joined by a host of others....

We have attempted to help people work out clearly just why the right to food should be a central issue in the life of the church, as the church seeks to be faithful to its mandate of seeking wholeness for human beings everywhere....

Last of all, may I address the issue of the need for action. As one goes through the various stages described, the almost inevitable end question is "What can I do?" That is sometimes hard to answer in the kind of answer many people seem to want — some easy way to execute action that, once accomplished, gets the problem off the mind. The nature of what we are about as an education program leads us to give the following answers:

We need to get off the backs of those who ... are doing the work and research. We need to give the benefit of the doubt to these people rather than give the benefit of doubt to the voices of the "principalities and powers".

The second thing we can do is to then study what is being written and educate ourselves. This may sound a bit trite, but the commitment to self-education demands a wrestling with the issues that no other small action does. The process of education itself must be understood as one of the most significant kinds of action. An educated people ... is one of our best hopes for change.

— Jean Moffatt, Waterloo, Ont.

letters, boycotts, petitions or publicity to influence the policies of corporations. If successful, such actions change the thing at issue, such as a particular advertising slogan but it seems obvious, as we argued in Chapter Three, that the companies cannot be expected to make any important changes.

On the other hand, action aimed at the companies can slow down their methods of gaining control and can express support for the poor in Canada and Third World countries by trying to halt immoral selling practices. In several informal discussions, we heard of a continental boycott of Nestlé products, a campaign protesting Nestlé's program of selling infant formula to Third World mothers who could otherwise be breastfeeding. Nestlé's sales campaigns have increased infant mortality by encouraging the use of formula in areas where people do not have clean water or incomes high enough to afford the formula.

Action aimed at the companies has an educational side, too. Through these interactions with corporate officials, people often come to realize that the industry operates only for profit and will never give them long-term satisfaction. Sometimes this lesson is a surprise side-effect. For example, an environmental group in Edmonton called STOP (Save Tomorrow, Oppose Pollution) began taking large companies to court and appearing before judicial and quasi-judicial tribunals to force them to stop polluting. STOP usually lost its court battles, but it began to realize that there was a second edge to its campaign. If it could involve the community in each court case, more and more people would see that the state does not protect them or their environment from corporate polluters. So what seemed a failure came to look like a success — in terms of the larger struggle. A crack is opened up in the "belief wall".

A POOR PEOPLE'S CO-OP, WINDSOR, ONTARIO

Well, we thought we had the answer to the problem of getting low cost, nutritional foods to our needy. And for a while it really worked! The answer — a food buying club operating on the lowest possible markup.

When we first started all we had was hope and a knowledge of the need for such a group. The people heard about it and asked to join. Friends that were concerned offered what they could — their ideas, their cars, their time and trust in us. We approached a few groups and received some support in the form of finances and being able to draw upon their contacts — "who do we go to next?"

The only criteria for membership were that the incomes of members be at or below the poverty-line and that they volunteer their services when needed.

With approximately $300 in the bank we decided to hold our first sale. Our sales were held in each other's homes and were held once a month. At cheque time.

We dickered — boy, did we dicker! Farmers for produce, chicken ranchers, wholesalers — we approached them all. And, to be honest, we were readily accepted and encouraged by most. Even the other food co-op still operating in Windsor offered assistance. However, they are a health food co-op and what we handled were staples for a weekly menu. Cabbage, lettuce, onions, peppers, carrots, apples, oranges, eggs, peanut butter, honey, bread and anything else we could get a good buy on.

Another part of our services was putting out a monthly newsletter containing news about members, recipes, budget stretchers, with nutrition always in mind and some sort of article dealing with social concerns that would probably, in one way or another affect our lives.

Eventually the need for some sort of financial assistance was realized and the application for a Secretary of State grant was accepted. This purchased only office supplies and the rental of a typewriter and covered a period of six months.

The work grew and was more than just a few part-time volunteers could handle. Another application for a Company of Young Canadians' worker was submitted and we were fortunate enough to have a full-time employee for about three months. We applied for a LIP [Local Initiatives Program] grant and were denied. The reason stated — 'Duplication of Services'.

Still, we did operate for about a year and were successful in obtaining our letters patent.

Sadly enough, it was because of the criteria for membership, trying to help those that need help so desperately, that we hatched our own "Catch 22". Because our entire membership roll was made up of the poor — these same people didn't have cars to do the running around, have the extra finances for baby sitting so we could volunteer, and did not have the experience to approach people and make contacts. There were not very many of us who wanted to cause waves or even enquire into our God-given right to good food on our tables.

Thinking back, the reason that we lasted as long as we did was through the kindness and consideration of a very few people in the Windsor community who volunteered to help and who will never be forgotten for their determination and drive in trying to make Food Economy of Windsor work.

... So you see there are alternatives.

— Dorothy Stevenson, Windsor, Ont.

Establishing co-ops is one way of getting some control over food merchandising. This is the Steephill Food Co-op, Saskatoon.

Blind Alley: Expecting the Government to Do It

Many of the points made in regard to the corporations apply as well to the government. The tendency of the government is support for the corporations. And until enough Canadians are ready to work for a different kind of government, we cannot expect the government to change the underlying causes of our problems. However, work aimed at influencing the government can make important reforms, slow down the drive of the corporations to gain control, and express support for other struggling people. Since the government had a greater stake in meeting people's needs than industry does, there is more chance of influencing its policies. Besides, actions aimed at the government provide first-hand experience of its workings and can have the same teaching power as actions aimed at the corporations.

Blind Alley: Personal Control

The Commission heard from many who, having realized that there is little control over the institutions that bring us food, are working to get control over their own food through co-ops, gardens or subsistence farming. When people see personal control over their food as an end in itself, this form of action becomes another blind alley. Personal self-sufficiency can pull active, courageous people out of wider political action, it can reinforce individual competitiveness, and can end up creating new opportunities for the corporations to sell gardening equipment and wood stoves.

If multinationals control seed production, they not only tighten their grip on our food resources, they shrink the available gene pool.

PLANT BREEDERS' RIGHTS

Right now, plant generic material and seed varieties are public property. Seed companies can make money only on their service of selling seeds. The new legislation would give seed companies the right to patent a seed variety and to charge royalties on it. There are several dangers if the new legislation is passed:

1. The legislation will give new impetus to the development and marketing of new, genetically uniform, hybrid varieties.

In the Third World this means increasing the speed of the "Green Revolution" and the death of traditional plant varieties. Poor countries have until now had enormous varieties of plants because peasant farmers there select their seed for reliability. They want enough variety to ensure some crop in spite of any insect, weather or disease that could come along. As the new, uniform varieties are introduced, the old varieties, products of ten thousand years of careful selection, are disappearing, leaving the whole world with drastically reduced genetic resources.

In Europe, where the plant breeders' legislation has been adopted, nearly three-quarters of the crop and vegetable varieties have been wiped out.

The U.S. National Academy of Sciences has described all our food crops as "impressively vulnerable" to insects and disease. The reason? North American plant breeders have selected on the basis of uniformity and high yield. We have, then, only a few, genetically uniform varieties growing in our fields. An insect or disease could wipe out a whole variety in a single season. In fact this has happened; rust in the wheat crop in 1916 forced Canadians to observe two "wheatless days a week" in 1917.

2. The introduction of the Breeders' Rights legislation has triggered a race among the large multinational chemical corporations to buy seed companies. Royal Dutch Shell is now the largest seed company in the world, closely followed by Sandoz, Ciba-Geigy, Pfizer and Monsanto. Two food corporations — General Foods and Cargill — are also buying up seed companies. All of these companies produce agriculture chemicals. When they control seed production, the danger is that they will breed seeds which require larger and larger doses of their fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides.

3. The chemical companies who are buying up the seed companies have banded together into an organization called the Canadian Seed Trade Association. In 1977, this group suggested that the actual seed research continue to be done in the universities and government agencies. Byron Beeler, Executive Vice-President of Ciba-Geigy, has said: "Personally, I see research divided into the discovery phase, and the exploitation phase. I believe that most of the discovery work in plant breeding . . . will continue in the public institutions. Conversely, I believe that the exploitation of the research can best be done by private enterprise."

In other words, the people of Canada can pay the price and take the risks of the research; and the private corporations can make the profit from it!

Whoever controls seed production and distribution has a

very powerful hand in the control of our food supply. Through this legislation, the multinationals would be handed an even greater control in the development of our food resources. The issue is on our doorstep right now.

— from SEEDS, a broadsheet produced by Ten Days for World Development and the Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation; tabled in Regina, Sask.

On the other hand, these projects do help to develop a critique of advertising, television and other messages of the urban environment, and can sometimes lead people to think about working towards gaining control on a larger scale, through working with others. When this kind of work towards food self-sufficiency is used in the context of a larger struggle to take back control of our institutions, it can be a very powerful way to get people together, get them talking and learning, expressing their dissatisfactions, developing an analysis of the food system, and devising ways to involve more people in working towards change.

Blind Alley: Working Against Other Victims

When people begin to act to change their circumstances, they easily fall into actions that can hurt other people who have no more power than they do. Our daily exposure to advertising, entertainment, news and education teaches us effectively to blame one another. When people have no overall picture of the system, they can bring about some wasteful situations: for instance, farmers and packing plant workers confronting one another on a picket line (as happened in Regina, where a farmer was killed in a scuffle with a worker on a picket line set up by the Canadian Agricultural Movement in front of the Intercontinental Packing Plant, on March 2, 1978); heavily publicized consumer boycotts giving companies a handy justification for holding down both wages to their employees and prices to their producers; immigrants being insulted and mistreated by Canadians who believe that "they are taking our jobs"; or bitter arguments and divisions between groups which are all committed to change.

All of these situations result from divide-and-conquer tactics. All can gradually be overcome by a broader understanding of the system we live in. We need to recognize who are our allies, who are our enemies; who really has power and who does not.

As we come to understand who our real allies are, we can begin to reach out, make common cause with other groups, engage in actions together, or at least make statements supporting one another's actions. The Commission heard small farmers and inshore fishermen talking together in Prince Edward Island, with both groups recognizing how similar their problems are. Zoel Bosse in Edmunston, N.B., told how the co-op he belongs to supported workers locked out of a local mill. People organizing to buy additive-free food could be seeking out workers in processing plants who mix up vats of chemicals and risk exposure. Low-income groups trying to organize transportation to take advantage of "bargains" in suburban stores could be joining with those who are struggling to save farmers' markets.

JARDINS COMMUNAUTAIRES

The Commission heard about a delightful and hopeful project in Ottawa, Ont. What follows is our summary of Monique Pasuali's story. She is the co-ordinator of the "jardins communautaires" (community gardens).

The "jardins communautaires" were started three years ago, as a community program of Algonquin College. It began slowly the first year, but grew to include fifty families, mostly on welfare, from Ottawa's Centretown. The group grew forty-two different kinds of vegetables on a 50' by 50' plot rented from the National Capital Commission.

There were community outings to care for the garden, expeditions to pick-your-own vegetable and fruit farms, trips to gather wild food, communal meals, communal food storage and lessons on cooking and nutrition. The community included small children and elders — four generations — in their good times together.

Similar projects were about to begin with older people in Russell Heights and families in Lower Town, both low income areas. However, clouds appeared on the horizon in the third year.

First, the National Capital Commission refused permission to use the land. Most NCC garden plots are rented to single people or couples. Presumably, fifty families were too many! The group began a campaign to find land. They applied for the use of vacant lots, land being held for building purposes, and park land. All their requests were refused. Finally, as part of an overall budget cut, Algonquin College cut off the funding for the program altogether.

This was the state of affairs at the time of the hearing, and there were many questions. Why did Algonquin cut a successful program, which was helping so many people feed themselves, when they kept many programs intact which serve only a few people? Why do the municipal government, the federal government and the developers turn a deaf ear to a program which is cutting down people's dependence on welfare? Above all, in a city famous for its acres of flower gardens, why is there no room for a community vegetable garden?

Since the hearing, we received word that the families have raised enough money to buy some land, and the program will go on.

After all the People's Food Commission has seen and heard through the process of its inquiry, it is obvious that there is hope in this kind of joint action.

Other kinds of action can be very useful to help us all understand how the system works and find our allies, but one important first goal must be to join forces.

Backlash

When people really do begin to work together effectively, it will not be long before there is a backlash from the corporations, which have too much at stake to give up without a fight. With their many resources to draw upon, the companies are in a good position to create confusion and division. People who decide to work towards basic change in the economic system are tagged with labels: brainwashed, irresponsible, faddists, ill-informed, hysterical, romantics, unrealistic, communists, reds, leftovers from the sixties. The struggle is often over how to expose whose interests are being served by the corporate-controlled food system and how producers and consumers can wrest back that control. It can be very confusing, and the only way to withstand the onslaught is by sticking together.

There can also be even more punitive action taken to prevent change. There is, for instance, the experience of people in the Third World: companies depart for other locations where the "investment climate" is better, leaving people out of work and hungry and having to recover from dependence upon the companies; and, further down the road — if our own history has anything to teach us — police repression. It seems a distant possibility at this point in Canada

Rod Bishop, Green Lake potato grower and Métis activist, Meadow Lake, Sask. hearing.

GROWING POTATOES IN GREEN LAKE, SASKATCHEWAN

Green Lake is a small Indian and Métis community in northern Saskatchewan. Three commissioners and one staff person travelled there in January 1979 to talk to Rod and Rose Bishop. Rod and Rose are deeply involved in work with their people — Rod with the Saskatchewan Métis Council, Rose with the Saskatchewan Native Women's organization — but we talked to them about potatoes. They grow seventy acres of potatoes each year, and involve as many people as possible from their community in planting, weeding, harvesting, and driving the produce north to sell it in communities where the monopoly on groceries is held by the Hudson's Bay Company. The people who come together to work in the field, not only work, they talk, and in the process, they have raised some of the key issues in the community and begun to do something about them.

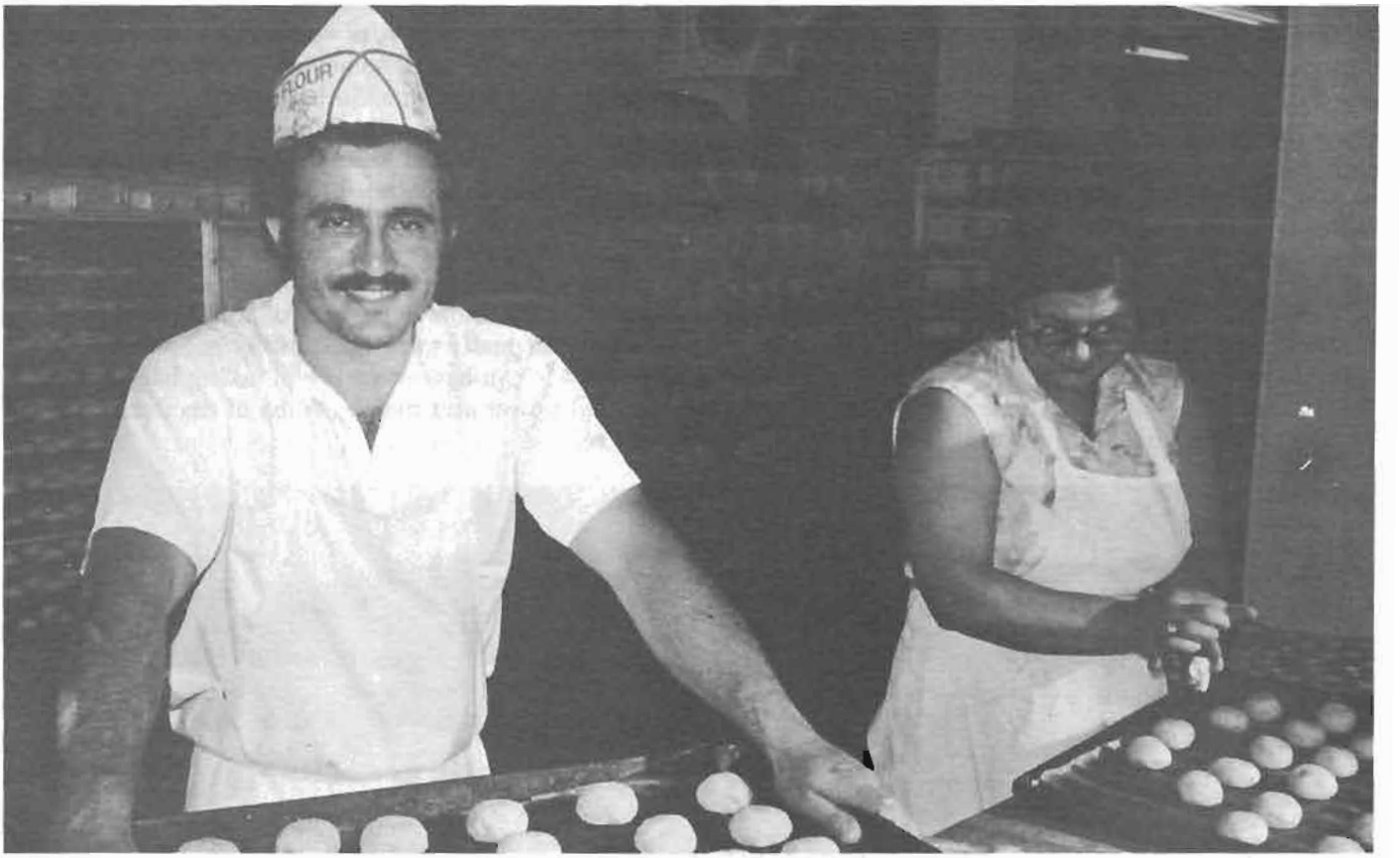
The question came up: Should people be allowed to come and work when they are drunk? This opened up discussion on alcoholism, a major problem in the north. People also began to deal with the tensions between status, non-status and Métis people. Another year the question arose of racism in the schools. Native children were coming home with stories of insults and beatings from their teachers. As a result there are now four Métis and Indian people on the school board, leading the community's efforts to get better education for their children. All this over a field of potatoes!

This project illustrates a number of important aspects about any group which is moving towards a change in the social and economic system:

1. The project is rooted in a community. The same people see one another day after day and year after year. Each action and discussion can lead on gradually to a better understanding of the overall system.

2. The action and discussion centre around the issues that are important to people at the time. Any issue can lead to a larger system analysis; it is important to start with whatever is currently on people's minds.

3. The process is a cycle of discussion and action. The action of growing potatoes brought people to the stage where they had to discuss alcoholism and decide if people would be allowed to work when they had been drinking. A discussion of the poor quality of food further north led to the action of hauling potatoes north to sell. Discussion of the children's problems at school led to getting four native people on the school board. At each step of the way action leads to discussion, which leads to new action, which leads back to discussion. At each stage, the action is based on more experience and a better understanding of how the community and its institutions work. This is a good recipe for becoming continually more effective in the struggle to change the social and economic system.



Bakery workers in Saskatchewan. Forming links is of vital importance.

to face police repression, but we have already often seen police action against strikers, police harassment of native people's groups, illegal and excessive measures taken against other groups considered "subversive". The only way to face the backlash from the owners of capital and their supporters is with strong links of understanding and solidarity among people.

LABELS

But what happens when I try to speak out against human indignities and try to give people information about how corporations are exploiting people (either in Third World countries or here in Canada)? People . . . categorize me as a socialist or a communist or a Marxist or Maoist or "one of those poor wretches who has succumbed to the brainwashing of these groups". . . . Why can't an individual ask questions requiring us to examine our accepted way of living without being categorized as a rabblerouser or radical? I have become very frustrated and angry at our society, which will not recognize me as a unique individual wishing to grow and develop by asking questions but wants to categorize me as antisocial.

— Michael Waterhouse,
Kitchener, Ont.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR SOLUTIONS

I believe that what makes the multinationals happy is the fact that we're so divided. As an example of solidarity we invited the locked-out workers from the mill in Degelis to shop at our co-op without paying membership shares. Those who were already members were exempted from the usual administrative costs. It's not really that there is not enough food to go around. . . . It's more that we have less and less money to buy it. What will force the rich to hoard less so the poor can get their fair share? It's up to you to answer that question. I'm convinced of one thing . . . that the answer does not lie in the divisions among us. Let's work in solidarity and one day we will find the solutions together.

— Zoel Bosse,
Edmunston, N.B.

The formation of these links is of vital importance. We have to overcome the divisions between sectors, classes, sexes, races and languages, divisions so strongly encouraged by the system we live in. We also need to overcome our isolation as groups working to change the system. All too often we see only our own battle. We need to work at building a network, united by a common

understanding of the roots of the problem, able to share information and support one another's actions.

This sense of working together was expressed beautifully by Trudy Richardson, a Commission worker in Edmonton, during a meeting between the Commission and the natives of the Blood Reserve in southern Alberta. We will let Trudy sum up this chapter (and the thrust of the People's Food Commission):

> In all of the groups that the PFC talked with, there's a common theme of people who are the grassroots people, the poor people, who are beginning to recognize that there are forces acting on them that are purposely denying their rights, and usually it's for some kind of profit motive, to get money for somebody else. And all of us are working in some way or other with those kinds of groups. So I wouldn't want us to think that we are coming down to help the people in the Blood Reserve. All of us across Alberta and Canada need to help ourselves to learn from each other how to organize to fight that kind of power. So I don't see myself as helping the native people as much as working with you to understand how together those of us who continually get ripped off by people in power . . . can begin to work at taking back some of that power and making some of the decisions ourselves.

The Second Prairie Food Co-op Conference, March 1978, Edmonton, Alta.

Epilogue

THE PEOPLE'S Food Commission has come to an end — at least, as a distinct organization. The report is on paper and, we hope, the people are putting their new analysis, contacts, information and energy to the task of bringing about change in the food system.

We set out knowing that there are damaging trends in the way food is produced and distributed, wanting to find out why these trends exist and how they affect people's lives. Above all, we wanted to find common ground between farmers, fishing people, workers and those who eat the food produced. Have we succeeded?

We did succeed in holding a national commission. People responded, participated, contributed money and time. Organizations supported us. The Commission gave us all living proof that there are hundreds of people across the country who are concerned and willing to act to change things. It gave many of us hope.

We also did find the information we wanted — boxes and boxes of it. From the information we were able to put together a picture of the food economy that will guide our action from here on.

We did find potential common ground among the sectors we worked with; however, it is still only potential common ground. Here is where we met our limits. People are sorely divided, caught up in blaming one another for their ills. Farmers who participated in the PFC process are still saying that consumers could change it if they wanted to. People are still pointing at "greedy labour" as the cause of rising prices. Men are still accusing women of taking their jobs. People aware of the dangers of agricultural chemicals are still blaming farmers for using them. Middle income people are still saying that the poor could eat well if they only knew how to budget. These are all myths, all symptoms of our deep divisions. The People's Food Commission has barely begun the task of overcoming them.

Another limit to our work has been the comfort that most Canadians experience. It is hard to convince people that increasing poverty, dependence and destruction of our resources are the logical outcome of the present mode of organization. Unlike some people in the underdeveloped countries, we haven't been pressed so close to the wall that there is no choice but to work towards a new world order.

The third limit we found is a lack of political organization. Farmers, workers, low-income groups, minority racial groups and others have all formed organizations; but, together, these and other groups are still politically weak. The organizations formed are more often for mutual support than for political action. Missing is a strong national network, an alliance aimed at having an impact on the country's political structures. Here again, people are divided.

There is a big job ahead, one that will need many hands, (not to mention hearts and minds). It is the task of finding unity in the effort to take control of our own means of living. We need to become much clearer about who are our allies and who are going to work against us, and, once we find our allies, be ready to work with openness and respect for different perceptions coming from different experience.

The risks are high. Visitors to the Commission from poorer countries seemed to be ahead of us in forming political organizations devoted to social and economic change. They told us in no uncertain terms that such an effort eventually means lost jobs, imprisonment, even loss of life. We can't fool ourselves that what we are talking about will be easy.

On the other hand, the commitment and support that these people feel from the organizations they have formed give them the confidence and hope to face whatever they have to face.

This is the challenge to us, to feel the commitment, solidarity and hope, risk the dangers, and move ahead towards a Canada where we are in control of our own resources, where our labour and land can be used for the benefit of everyone, not for the private gain of a few individuals.

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Locations of PFC Hearings

1. Victoria
2. Nanaimo
3. Courtenay
4. Vancouver
5. Richmond
6. Chilliwack
7. Penticton
8. Kelowna
9. Kamloops
10. Salmon Arm
11. Hudson Hope
12. Fort St. John
13. Taylor
14. Dawson Creek
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16. Cadotte Lake
17. Peace River
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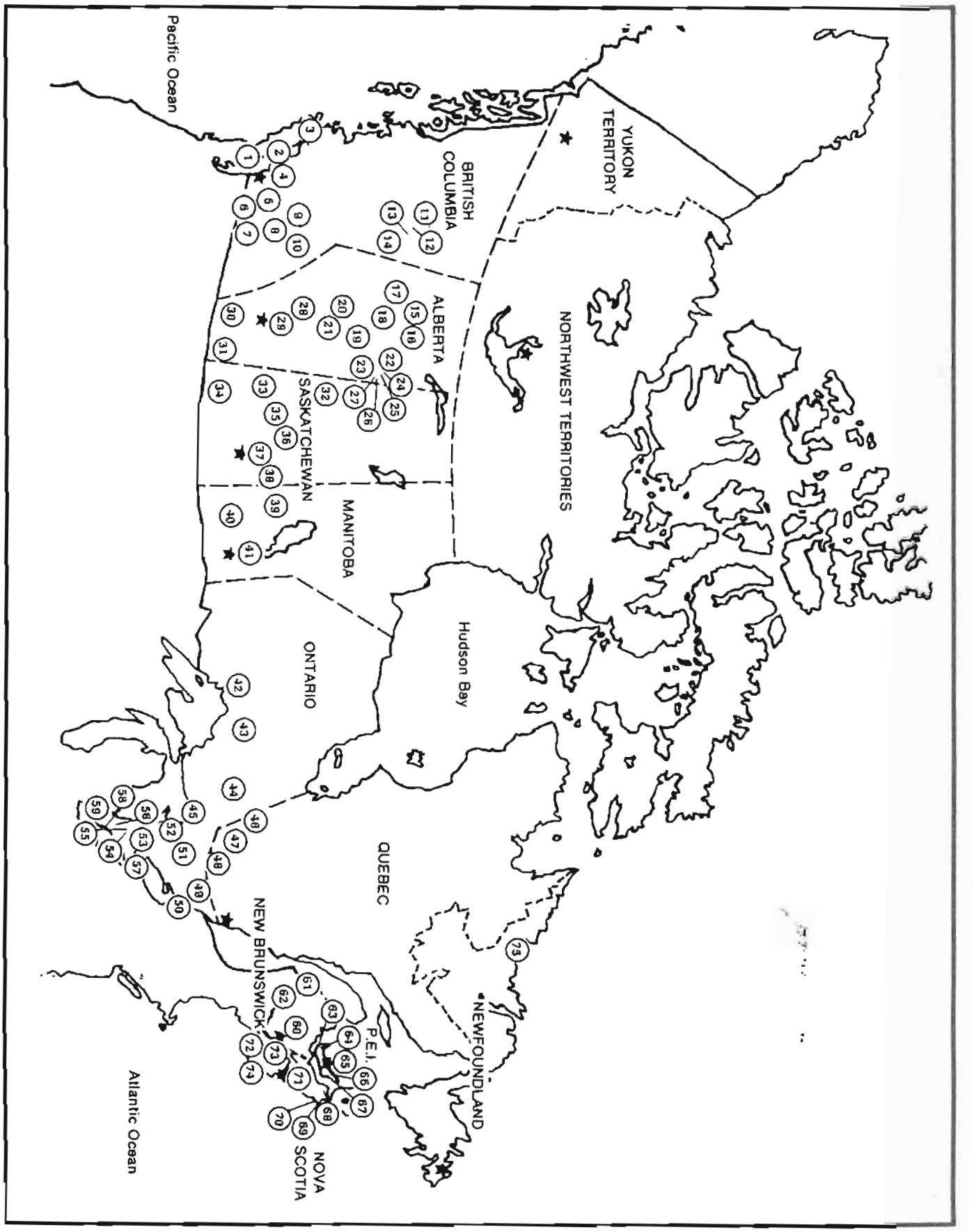
Pacific Ocean
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NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
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ALBERTA
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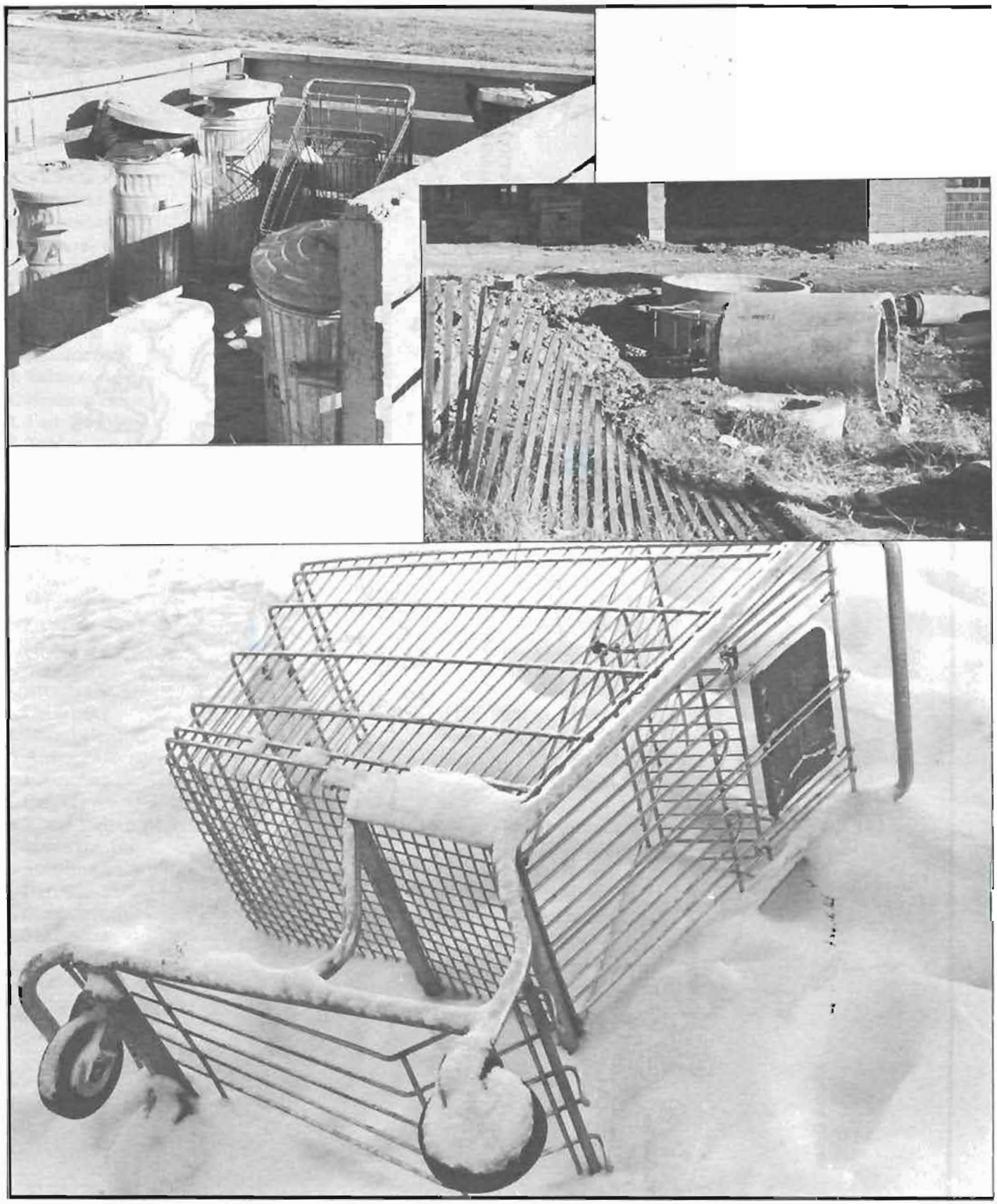
ONTARIO
Hudson Bay
QUEBEC
NEWFOUNDLAND
NEW BRUNSWICK
P.E.I.
NOVA SCOTIA
Atlantic Ocean



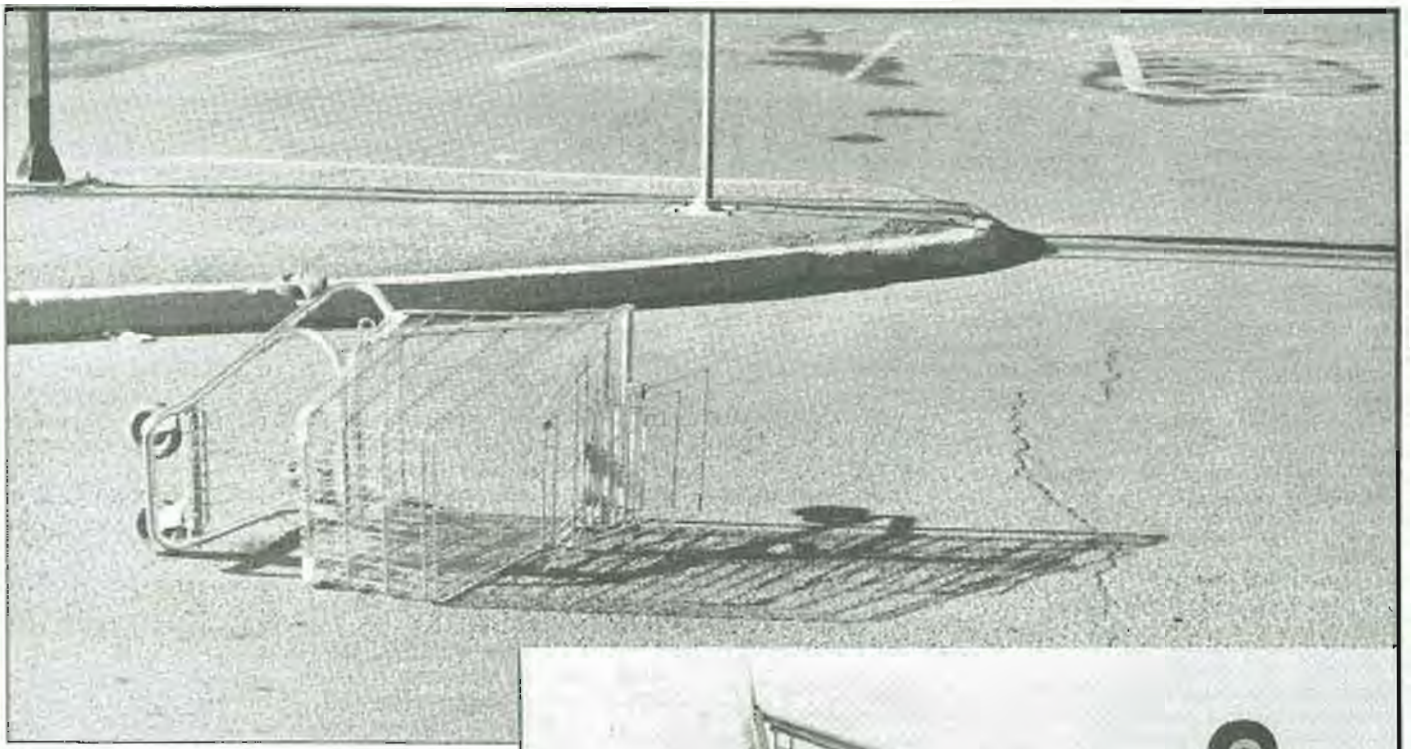


Photo presentation to an Alberta hearing by Evelyn Nouge.

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The Land of Milk and Money

The National Report of the People's Food Commission

In the past four years food prices have more than doubled. Since 1945 about 80 per cent of the country's farmers have left their land. The farmers and fishermen remaining are forced to produce more and more each year just to stand still on the economic ladder, while consumers end up eating food rich in chemical content but poor in taste and nutrition. Increasingly, power in Canadian agriculture and food distribution rests in the hands of a few large corporations.

The Land of Milk and Money is an indictment of the way agriculture and the food industry are organized in Canada. It is closely based on over 1,000 submissions presented to the People's Food Commission at over 70 public hearings and consultations across Canada. By letting Canadians speak for themselves, **The Land of Milk and Money** outlines the destructive trends that make our food less healthy and more expensive. It provides a close view of those trends by focusing on case studies of the tomato industry, the Thunder Bay agricultural region and the wheat trade. People give their views of what's wrong (less often, what's right) and offer their solutions. The report evaluates the solutions and analyses how the trends fit together into the "logic of the system."

The value of the People's Food Commission lies in the involvement of ordinary people who have the ability to reduce issues to practicalities.

Odetta Keating, Penticton

As I see it, the main value of the PFC is in providing a forum for consumers, producers and workers alike to come together and to share their thoughts and feelings about the food system here in Canada. It allows us to sharpen our perceptions and to gain some feeling of solidarity in a common struggle.

Don Sugden, Saskatoon

We hope that by these discussions with other ordinary people, that we can find allies and alleviate some of the helplessness we feel in our day to day living.

Scott Mission Mothers Group, Toronto

We wish at the outset to commend the courageous work of the individuals responsible for having devised the concept of this Commission. We are pleased to identify with its objectives.

National Farmers Union, Regina

I found the PFC to be an extremely effective medium for getting across some of labour's concerns to people who would not otherwise have had an opportunity to hear from us directly. The most important contribution of the PFC, in my opinion, was the cross-fertilization of ideas, attitudes, resources and objectives that naturally occurred as a result of many different types of people coming together for a single purpose. My exposure to other actors in the food system was downright mind-expanding, and I know it was for many others as well.

Bill Reno (from Ontario Report)

A unique weave of the experiences of individuals — their concerns and outrage — and the insights of those labouring to make sense of the whole. The People's Food Commission moves me because of its willingness to face up to the complexities. Clearly, the Commission was born out of a desire to understand, communicate and, most of all, build bridges among those who have before seen themselves pitted against each other. An inspiring, very human, call to action.

Frances Moore Lappé