

Canagrex Act

and the Crown corporation which would allow the Crown corporation to be the instrument of policy it was intended to be. I very definitely agree with the hon. member for Portage-Marquette that there is a great need for Crown corporations to be much more responsible to the government, to Parliament or to the country than they are at present. Because of the criteria I have outlined, we in Canada have come to expect that public corporations should have a public conscience and be an instrument of government policy.

On the whole, however, federal Crown corporations are a sorry lot. It has been said quite often that there is not one good federal Crown corporation. If we look over the main public corporations, we can find a considerable amount of evidence to back that up. I refer here to the CNR, Eldorado, the Bank of Canada and Atomic Energy of Canada Limited. One of the reasons we say these are very bad corporations is that the government has not given them the kind of policy direction which would allow them to be good citizens or to provide the type of service we would like.

Some people, particularly free enterprise capitalists, say Crown operations are bad because they think they could make more money from the services which are being supplied to the people as a whole. This might be so. Free enterprisers might be able to make more money, but it would usually be at the expense of the service involved or of the consumers of the service. Others level that description of a sorry lot upon federal Crown corporations because these Crown corporations have not recognized their responsibilities. I am sure many hon. members have been abundantly impressed with the advertising of probably our most prominent Crown corporation, Canadian National Railways, the slogan of which for a long time has been "a business as well as a responsibility". Let us look carefully at how CN fulfils that responsibility. In no way has it provided the kind of service to Canada which has been expected of it. CN is unwilling to provide the kind of service for which it was set up. Lately we have been saying exactly the same thing about VIA Rail, a grandchild, I suppose, of the CNR and the CPR.

Some corporations are criticized because they have very little concern about the environment. For example, Atomic Energy of Canada Limited has had a record for many years of misuse of the environment. Often the labour relations records of Crown corporations are worse than those in the private sector. Crown corporations are also criticized because they often take regressive approaches to the services they provide.

● (1620)

The position of the newly established postal corporation is that the people most able to pay, such as Imperial Oil which sends out thousands of bills, can send them out at 21 cents each. The small-business man, however, who only sends out a few hundred bills, must pay 30 cents each. One can pick any federal Crown corporation and I am sure one will find some area where it has failed to fulfil one's idea of a publicly-owned corporation.

Canagrex is going to be another federal Crown corporation which will have some responsibility for the marketing of agricultural products. That sounds like a very good idea and it probably is. It will likely do some good in the marketing of agricultural products; but is there not a danger that it will follow the great sales tradition of Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. in the sale of Candu reactors? That sales promotion was a disaster for the corporation and for Canada as well. The sale of heavy water by the same corporation was another disaster which last year cost the taxpayers over \$600 million, and the cost is rising. Will it follow the loss of Consolidated Computer Inc. of \$91 million?

I raise these spectres not in an attempt to downgrade the possible value of Canagrex but to point out, as expressed by the hon. member for Portage-Marquette, that government control and intervention in marketing has often been inadequate. In fact, the arm's length policy of the federal government in relation to Crown corporations makes their effectiveness rather doubtful. I am almost inclined to agree with the hon. member for Elgin (Mr. Wise), who suggested that perhaps all we need is an agency. Maybe it is wrong to establish a Crown corporation. Traditionally, federal Crown corporations have operated at arm's length from the government. In the category of agencies we have an effective and efficient model in the Canadian Wheat Board with which we have had much much experience and much success.

What I am really suggesting, Mr. Speaker, is that when we examine Canagrex in committee perhaps we should examine its relationship to the government and the relationship of all Crown corporations to the government. Perhaps the chairman of the board should be the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan), so that when Canagrex does not perform well we can ask him questions about it. It is bad enough that the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board sits in the other place and that we are unable to ask questions of him, but at least he is the minister responsible for it. In the case of many corporations there is no one who has any responsibility within the corporation to whom we can put questions or to whom we can say that what the corporation is doing is wrong and that we should be told why that is the case.

I should like now to turn to the relationship of Canagrex to the industry. It is an important relationship. The industry is made up of a number of not distinct but interrelated parts. There is production at the farm level, there is transportation and there is processing which, in many cases, is value added before the marketing process. There are those four areas and there are possibly further parts to the whole industry, such as market development. Those parts cannot be separated with Canagrex taking care of the marketing phase only and ignoring all the others. That is a fallacy and we cannot accept it.

The grain pools in western Canada were formed in order to market grain and protect farmers from the line elevator companies that were gouging them, but now they have effectively become a part of all phases of the industry. The pools assist the farmer in getting seed, fertilizer and chemicals; they help him transport the grain to market; they help finance the