

*Canagrex*

and larger, the people who vote have less and less control over them. Members of Parliament are asked to decide many, many things with one vote. Another Crown corporation is going to make it tougher for us to control government and see that it does a good job for the taxpayers who foot the bill.

One way in which the government could do something about keeping this country competitive in exports is by establishing a stabilization plan for beef. Last December the minister spoke about this, and the agriculture committee offered to hold an in camera meeting if he wanted to discuss it. That is eight or nine months ago, and we have not heard anything about it since. If the government wants a competitive beef industry in this country, it should ensure that there is uniformity in pricing from coast to coast. When the provincial treasuries of each province bid against each other in order to maintain their beef industry, it is apparent that this is not good for the long-range prospects of a national beef industry.

Whether the minister likes it or not, the beef industry is of major importance in this country. It is important to agriculture because it is a large consumer of feed grains. A stabilization plan with uniformity of pricing from coast to coast would keep it competitive. Fortunately, the beef industry has a long history in this country, so I do not think that even the minister, in the ten years he has been in office, could destroy it. It is more credit to the beef industry if it survives, however, than to the minister.

I find it strange that the government wants to become involved in exporting some of these commodities without fulfilling its obligations at home to keep them competitive. I could make the same comments about a stabilization plan for hogs. There should be a national plan along the same lines as a beef stabilization plan, but no leadership has been shown by the federal government.

In April the Farm Credit Corporation Act, Bill C-88, was amended to allow the corporation to borrow funds by any means with the concurrence of the Minister of Finance. We have not seen any results from that as yet. There is a new head of the Farm Credit Corporation, and we give him credit—no pun intended—for the qualifications he brings to the job, and we wish him well in it. I would urge him to do what he has to do posthaste, however, because agricultural producers are facing very serious financial problems. An export Crown corporation would be meaningless if all our producers were out of business. The minister needs to do his homework and see that the provisions of Bill C-88 are implemented so that additional funds are made available to producers as quickly as possible.

I should like to deal with the minister's attitude toward the buy and sell and "engage in" provisions of the bill, Mr. Speaker. It has been said, and I will repeat it, that some of the functions set out in the bill are already being carried out by one or more government agencies or departments, so it seems that the government must want this bill in order that it may become more directly involved in the export of agricultural commodities. In fact, at committee the minister said so—in a very crude fashion which I found rather unfortunate. I will try to refine and clean up what he said, which was to the effect

that unless Canagrex is allowed to engage in the export of agricultural commodities it would be as useless as what I will call the mammary glands on a boar pig. I think this points to the government's deliberate intention to become directly involved in farming and the agricultural industry. We do not need that, Mr. Speaker.

By setting up a Crown corporation to promote and provide credit facilities, the government will provide competition for the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce. It is interesting that we could not persuade the Minister of Agriculture to allow the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce to send its witnesses to the committee to set out how the provisions of this bill would compete or complement Canagrex. One would think that if the government were interested in providing services to taxpayers at the least possible cost, it should co-ordinate the efforts of the different departments to this end. The Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce has a plan which pertains specifically to food, yet we did not have the opportunity of examining that program in committee and comparing it with the one that is proposed in this bill. I think we should be able to co-ordinate the programs to get the best value for our tax dollars.

Other problems came to light in committee. For instance, there are several commercial attaches with our embassies around the world who are strictly concerned with agriculture. I have to give credit to the former minister of agriculture in the Clark government, the hon. member for Elgin (Mr. Wise). In his brief tenure in office he increased the number of agricultural attaches with a view to accomplishing some of the things this bill sets out to do. I have to give him a lot of credit for that because when he proceeded as quickly as he did, he showed he was interested in agriculture, that it was a priority and he was interested in getting the job done. But if we have a situation where Canagrex, in its present form as a Crown corporation, would be competing with the private sector for agriculture exports and an agricultural attaché in Mexico City found a market for some white beans or navy beans, you would wonder where that information would go. Would it be made available as openly and freely to the private sector as it would be to the Crown corporation? You would think there would certainly be in some ways a conflict of interest there. That issue was raised several times in committee and is one which needs to be examined very closely because, by and large, the private sector has been doing a very good job as far as exports are concerned. There are several export firms in Canada competing with each other for export markets, but they can only compete fairly if every one of them has access to the same kind of information. Anyone who knows anything about marketing, particularly farm commodities, knows that if you go into a marketing situation and you are not equipped with all the information, then you are very much at a disadvantage.

● (2050)

It seems to me that in a situation where Canagrex was operating as a competitor to the private sector and there was information available from a federal government source, there would be some possibility at least of that information being