

Canagrex Act

minister's speech. This constituent is a farmer, and a good one. He is having some difficulty, but he believes he will weather the storm. That is not the case for a number of people at the producing end of agriculture. My constituent asked, "Will that boat really float?" He asked why we are doing this and taking this step. I had to say to him that I was concerned about it too. Heretofore, governments have thrown money at problems, but now this government is not throwing money at this problem. The figures my colleagues have cited have set that straight. The government is throwing another Crown corporation at a problem at a time when the government is in the course of reorganizing the external relations aspect of government to commercialize it and to develop the commercial side of it so that the government can reach out for the products of Canadians, whether farmers, business people or otherwise, and sell them to the purchasers of the world.

It has occurred to me that what is happening here is that we are following the usual practice of creating another agency, the salaries of the officers of which will never be published. Responsibility for this agency will not be with the external relations department of government. We are getting a panacea of doubtful validity. It is a bone thrown to the Minister of Agriculture. We will not be utilizing the newly reorganized external trade relations department of government. Why are we doing this? Why is it necessary to create a special agency for agriculture? Why do we dissipate our resources in the export market in the way we do?

● (1550)

Mr. Whelan: Are you suggesting we are just supposed to produce without selling?

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Why have we established a program with one of the best deputy ministers in government, Gordon Osbaldeston, in charge of exports?

Mr. Whelan: He supports it.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): He supports it because he is going to get it in his department. That is why he supports it, and that indicates the futility of the exercise we have been going through in the last little while. Of course he is going to get it in his department.

Mr. Whelan: No way.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): The Minister of Agriculture says, "No way," even if that is good for agriculture. The point is that once again, instead of dealing with the problem directly, the government is throwing a Crown corporation—not money this time—at the problem.

I have never been one to argue about the efficacy, importance and the place for Crown corporations in the economic scheme of things. I think they have a place. The St. Lawrence Seaway Corporation was a Crown corporation established to carry out and manage a project because that followed in the tradition of partnership which had developed in our history. We developed this country from a wilderness, and it is not

unusual that, as it developed with populations separated it was necessary for government to intervene. But it is a wise government that takes a look at the point of intervention.

The first question to be asked is whether such intervention is necessary, or are there devices which the government, if properly motivated, could in partnership with the private sector, use to do the job? I suspect there are, and I do not think the minister can sit at the cabinet table and approve the reshuffling of the ministry for trade purposes and at the same time argue that we need the corporation Canagrex to deal with one part of that. Think of that for a moment.

This is what my farmer constituent meant when he phoned me and asked, will this ship really float, and what is going on? I tell the minister in the last few minutes of this debate that this constituent said to me he was selling his products for less while his inputs for agriculture, including feed grain and fertilizer, are increasing in cost. He said he was gradually but inexorably getting less each year for his family and himself. What does he need? He needs cash. He does not need Crown corporations. What else does he need? He needs sales; not domestic sales but export sales. This man pointed out to me that a week ago the Government of Canada reorganized its export sales capacity. We will debate that at some stage, I gather, from what the government House leader has said. Obviously the government thought this out. Quite frankly, I think the Government of Canada did the right thing in bringing that export sales capacity into one place. It ought to examine other areas where that can be done. The government put in charge the best sales oriented public servant in Canada, Gordon Osbaldeston. Why do we bother setting up another organization which must be absorbed under that function? That should not be done if we are really intent on concentrating our exports. What is the difference, if there is expertise in the agricultural area for selling purposes in that government department?

You cannot fool farmers. The reason the Minister of Agriculture says the federation is in favour of this is that the federation, to a large extent, represents people in agriculture who are desperate. I think the government is throwing out a crumb in response to a problem, the solution to which requires a full loaf. If the Minister of Agriculture will put his milking hand down, perhaps I could finish my speech.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): The solution to this problem will require the concentrated efforts of the government, if we are to salvage some parts of agriculture, and the minister knows that.

The farmers of the country like the Minister of Agriculture. They think he is a great fellow. I too think he is a great fellow, but there is no one who thinks he is a great fellow more than the Minister of Agriculture himself.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!