

Canagrex Act

just do not have the human resources and the financial resources to go out and conduct market intelligence in various parts of the world.

● (1530)

The two Conservative members turned down the recommendation to form a Canada trading corporation which would promote general trade, increase employment, reduce the national deficit and thus help fight high inflation. The sad thing is that they had no alternatives to present to the committee. Five of the seven members, who were from the NDP and the Liberal side, agreed to major recommendations, but two Conservative members disagreed. That is how interested they are in helping farmers and small business and indeed in helping to build Canada. They would rather listen to the multinationals who say there is no need for this corporation. They will not listen to people who operate small or medium-sized businesses.

How can the Conservatives reconcile the fact that they support Canagrex which will promote the export of agricultural products in which we already have a good track record, and oppose a Canada trading corporation which would promote exports of manufactured products, a sector of trade in which there is a deficit of about \$17 billion annually? I wish the Conservatives would get their act together and let Canadians know exactly what they stand for.

Mr. Lewis: As you have on Poland.

Mr. Flis: I should like to share with hon. members the views of some farmers on this bill. I will quote from a letter I received from a Mr. E. W. B. Evans which reads in part as follows:

I am indeed grateful to you to have raised the matter of Canagrex in the House of Commons and I and other members of our agricultural committee and, indeed, the farm organization in Canada, would appreciate it if you could continue to apply pressure in the right quarters to hasten the implementation of Canagrex.

Certainly it is well known that the Canadian farmers, given the necessary incentives, can easily produce enough food to feed 55 million people. The export markets, on a long-term contractual basis, would not only raise the economic level of Canada agriculture, but also the other 30 per cent of the work force that are directly or indirectly tied in to the primary producer.

At a time when financial restraints in the community are affecting especially farmers and small business, and increasing the number of bankruptcies, it seems a shortsighted policy to not have already implemented Canagrex and the benefits that this would entail to our communities, and I believe, in some measure help to eliminate a lot of antagonism that exists between East and West. The problems of agriculture are common across the country and if agriculture prospers, so do the majority of Canadians in direct proportion.

Food producers have been requesting a corporation such as Canagrex for some time. If they believe that such a corporation will help export more of their products and bring greater stability to the food-producing industry, then let us put aside our partisan politics and let us all support this bill with one united voice.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops-Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure this afternoon to speak to Bill C-85, an act to establish a corporation called Canagrex to

promote, facilitate and engage in the export of agricultural and food products from Canada.

I certainly welcome any opportunity to speak out on behalf of Canada's food producers and to play my part on behalf of the NDP in encouraging the government to take whatever action is necessary to develop a sound agricultural sector in Canada.

Some hon. members may inquire how my background qualifies me to speak on this particular topic. Mr. Speaker, as a youngster I grew up in southern Alberta and spent a great deal of time working on large dairy operations and on some of the largest cattle spreads in western Canada. Members of my extended family farm today in southern and central Saskatchewan and northern Alberta. The constituency that I represent in central British Columbia is the home of the largest cattle operations in Canada and indeed, according to some people, in the Commonwealth. There is a very diversified and important agricultural base with strong and innovative leadership coming from both the federal and provincial departments of agriculture which are represented in the constituency.

Statistics for 1980 indicate that Canada exported approximately \$8 billion worth of agricultural products and imported approximately \$5 billion worth. In positive terms, this provided us with an agricultural surplus for that year. While that is good news, generally speaking when one considers the commodities involved, it will be seen that by and large they were exports of bulk commodities such as grains and that the imports tended to be the more specialized products that are used for immediate consumption. Therein lies the difficulty and one of the major challenges that face us. Of the \$5 billion worth of foodstuffs that were imported, experts say that \$3 billion worth could be grown here. Apples and fresh fruits could be produced in at least three areas of the country, as could soybeans, oats and a variety of vegetables if the proper support systems were in place.

If one reads the agricultural history books it will be seen that not many years ago in the constituency of Kamloops-Shuswap large acreages were planted in tomatoes, watermelons, cucumbers, hops, corn, potatoes, asparagus and apples, yet today virtually none of these food crops are under cultivation. A great deal of agricultural potential obviously exists in this country and it should be put to good use.

Many livestock producers in my riding ask why Canada is such a major beef and lamb importer when beef and lamb producers find themselves in difficulty. We have an opportunity now to create jobs not only for Canadian farmers but for Canadian processors.

I recently had an opportunity to co-chair a task force on the economy that toured Canada, Mr. Speaker. Time after time, when food producers appeared before that task force, they said that the productive capacity of their farms was in the range of 40, 50 or 60 per cent and that if new markets were available they could easily expand that by working in new varieties of crops and livestock into their operation.