

Canagrex

selling activities would be limited to joint ventures with private traders, farm marketing boards or state to state deals.

Yet the opposition increases. More than 20 agricultural associations, representing more than half the agricultural industry measured by cash receipts from farm production, are now out against Canagrex. So are the Consumers Association of Canada, the Canadian Manufacturers Association, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Export Association, and the Export Trade Development Board. And so, briefly, when he was a junior minister and more easily shushed by his seniors, was Industry and Regional Expansion Minister Edward Lumley, who might not now be so easily shushed.

The Minister of Agriculture has made a variety of comments following his press release of February, 1981 announcing Canagrex. I would quote from one of them:

We must not surrender to the fear and the suspicion and cynicism that would smother Canagrex. Canagrex will help to show that we can co-operate, we can act positively as a nation, in the national interest.

Then in December, 1982, after only two days of proposed debate, he brought in closure. The last day of proposed debate in the House adjourned with me sitting in my seat waiting to speak and the Liberals could not find 18 Members of Parliament to form a quorum to debate this Bill. Then the Minister brought in closure.

We have an interesting situation and one that provides an opportunity for the Government to live up to its responsibility and the brave words of co-operation by the Minister.

We all have pride and expectation for Canada's agricultural producers. The one million Canadian farm workers each produce ten times the amount that a Russian farm worker produces and 100 times the amount an Asian farmer produces. Productivity has increased three times in the last 20 years and 12 times in the last 50 years. Our agricultural exports in 1981 were \$8.8 billion and growing. We can do better and the Government can assist.

None of us is that happy with another Crown corporation. But if this is the best answer that the Liberals have to improve our long-term agricultural exports, then there is a consensus that Canagrex could be tried without the buy-sell provisions. The necessary financing could, as is now possible, be gained through Treasury Board approval. This would allow the corporation to be judged on its merit without having the automatic right to infringe on private enterprise activities which could give it a very unfair advantage, and if confidence was established it could be amended in the future. As it stands, it does indeed represent an entity capable of the worst fears of its detractors—unlimited and nearly unchallengeable bureaucratic invasion of the food production sector.

I do not expect the Minister to accept this suggestion because he has already refused on grounds that are at least as absurd as any argument against the Bill. Besides, it would be a reasonable thing to do and when he cannot do anything else for agriculture the smoke and mirrors of creating another diversion within agriculture is in his best political interest. It keeps farmers from putting themselves together to put pressure on him to help solve some of those root problems that threaten the viability of family farms across Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Dionne (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased with this opportunity to speak to Bill C-85, which is a very important piece of legislation for Canada's agricultural industry. As we all know, Canagrex will be a very important and useful agency for the Canadian agricultural sector. I wish I could say that I had invented Canagrex, but I have to admit that the suggestion came from the Canadian Federation of Agriculture.

The agency was created as a direct result of requests made by the Canadian Federation of Agriculture to the federal Government for an organization to promote export sales of agricultural products. In its representation, the Federation emphasized the fact that Canada's efforts to market agricultural products abroad were both fragmented and limited. Fragmented, because our trading partners often have trouble finding out with whom they should be dealing, and limited, because many producers who would be able to export Canadian agricultural products do not have the necessary resources to bring their products on the world market.

• (1115)

We know all the arguments advanced by opponents to the Bill. They claim the Bill would be an affront since it ignores everything they have done to promote exports of our agricultural products.

Perhaps we should stop here for a while. As I said before, positive measures have been taken in the agri-food export business in the past, especially with respect to wheat, oil seeds and meat. No one is denying that. In fact, all this is clear from the fact that last year, our agricultural exports were worth \$9.5 billion, which means a trading surplus of \$3.1 billion, and 60 per cent of that surplus was due to grain and oil seed exports.

However, and this is our justification for creating the Canagrex Corporation, if we compare the remainder of our exports, that is, minus the grain component, with our total imports, we have an agricultural trade deficit of approximately \$2 billion.

The non-grain sector of our industry is lagging behind because, as was pointed out earlier, here in Canada we do not have a mechanism to help farmers seek out potential markets.

Canadian farmers themselves have expressed the need for an agency like Canagrex that would provide a more diversified and better co-ordinated approach to the marketing of agri-food products abroad. It is not a takeover of our agricultural industry or a Communist plot, as our opponents are claiming in their propaganda literature. In fact, the kind of propaganda being made about Canagrex and the Crow rate reminds me of the words of a former President of the United States, Franklin Roosevelt, who said that we have nothing to fear but fear itself.