

Canagrex Act

handle everything concerned with our way of life. With that we disagree. We need to ask the question, Mr. Speaker, is Canada really better for having over 400 Crown corporations? Before we had those 400 Crown corporations, the vast bulk of which have come into existence in the last 15 years, Canada was clearly on a rising curve. We were a growing nation, one that achieved the second highest standard of living in the entire world under that system. However, in the last 15 years we notice chinks in the armour and Canada's relative position is dropping when we compare ourselves with the other western industrialized nations. Is that because of Crown corporations? Maybe it is. I think it is a factor.

Mr. Anguish: Suncor, TWA.

Mr. Thacker: Is it because of other policies? We know that at least 25 per cent of new private enterprise will fail within the first year. That is a natural thinning out process caused by inefficiency or bad management. We have 400 Crown corporations, and under that rule you would think that perhaps 100 would have failed. But they never fail when they are involved with government. No matter how inefficient, they go on and on and we pour in more taxpayers' dollars. Look at the figures, Mr. Speaker. This House wrote off over \$600 million in order to balance the books of Atomic Energy of Canada, Limited, and the same amount for the St. Lawrence Seaway. Over \$800 million every few years for the CNR has to be written off. That is taxpayers' money, Mr. Speaker. That is money taken from the hides of Canadians, from the miners who have black lung disease and have to give over 50 per cent of their income to others who decide how it is spent—that is, we here in Parliament. To my way of thinking, that is a very heavy onus. I dislike the fact that we are taking other people's money. They are shortening their lives to pay us tax dollars, and we are deciding how to spend it. I believe that the Liberal government does not apply proper judgment or exercise control and self-restraint in the expenditure of this money.

● (1730)

Another reason Crown corporations are so dangerous is that they really erode the tax base so that there is not a fair sharing of the tax load in this country. We have over 400 Crown corporations, the vast bulk of which have very special tax rules and do not pay any income tax. That throws an extra burden on those truly productive people in our society, such as the miners who are digging up new coal for export to bring money into the country, the grain farmers, and the grape growers in the Niagara peninsula. Those are people who are genuinely producing something new which we sell to other countries. We take their money and, as a result, we have a higher standard of living. These Crown corporations erode that tax base and we should be very concerned about that. Unfortunately, the government is aided and abetted in that lack of concern to a tremendous degree by the NDP.

I want to deal with the situation facing agriculture because the government has led the Canadian people to believe that Canagrex will really solve the farmers' problems and will somehow put more money into their pockets. We know, and I

am sure Your Honour realizes as a producer, that the only way to put more money in farmers' pockets is to give them a better price for their products. The reality is that we have been selling our western grain at less than the cost of production. I know that for a fact, as a past producer. I am sure it is true with grapes and other agricultural products.

For example, the fertility of the western great plains has dropped by 50 per cent over the last 75 years. In short, when we first turned over that sod, it had much grass in it, as the grass had been fallowing for a long period of time it was very fertile soil. We have been producing grain from that soil and exporting that grain at a price; but the export price has never given us enough money to put enough return back into the land by way of proper rotation of green crops which would keep that fertility up. As a result, our western plains are now 50 per cent less fertile than they were 75 years ago. In another 15, 20 or maybe 50 years, our plains will clearly become a great, huge dustbowl. It must be stopped, and the only way it can be stopped is by increasing export prices. The government should be stressing that idea rather than the idea of an export corporation, because to produce more grain for export will simply mean a faster depletion of our soil.

We need more money, and that is where the government should be directing its attention, but it will not do so. It will not even officially talk to the United States, to Argentina and to Australia, the other major exporters of grain, concerning the situation. It has been left to hon. members on our side, such as the hon. member for Wetaskiwin (Mr. Schellenberger). He singlehandedly raised the concept with these grain exporting nations which at least agreed to charge a sufficient price to ensure that the land is returned to its former level of fertility. I would rather see our Minister of Agriculture directing his attention to that.

I would also like to see him directing his attention to providing more money for research and development. We would all be prepared to help him in any way possible. The Minister of Supply and Services has noted that we have a great research facility in my riding of Lethbridge which has made a tremendous contribution to Canada. Governments of all stripes and all parliamentarians should be proud that they have allocated money for that purpose. However, there is no doubt but that the plant is becoming more obsolete, the equipment is becoming more obsolete, and we simply need more money. We have an animal disease research centre where scientists are working under conditions which are rapidly becoming intolerable. The Minister of Agriculture wants to have a new building there, I certainly do, and so do all of the scientists.

Mr. Whelan: J. J. is going to help us.

Mr. Thacker: I suspect that "J. J.", as the Minister of Agriculture says, will help us. I will certainly write a letter to solicit his help. However, we need to allocate more money, and I am not sure that an allocation for an export corporation is a good idea at this time when I compare it to the needs of