

Canagrex Act

thirties. At this time when Canadian agriculture is suffering such severe problems, this government comes forward with Canagrex legislation.

The minister has been quoted as saying that something else he will do this year is to bring forward legislation dealing with off-track betting. That will certainly help the farming community in this country! This kind of attitude and performance by our Minister of Agriculture is a disgrace.

Let me talk about the bill before us. There is no doubt that Canada has to compete in foreign markets. In order to do that, we have to be as well represented as we can. Everyone agrees that the agricultural products produced in this country are second to none. We pride ourselves on the fact that our grain sets world standards. It is not enough to have the best; we have to be able to promote and sell it. There are not many who can quarrel with the intent of what Canagrex is being set up to do. However, we do have some concerns over the way this Canagrex legislation will tackle it.

Two days ago the minister spoke on second reading of this bill. He stated that Canagrex would run a tight ship. In the next sentence he said it would have wide-ranging powers. I am concerned that if Canagrex is given wide-ranging powers, it will be more difficult to run a tight ship.

That is a problem with a lot of our legislation today. Those who elect us to this place in normal times have one vote every four years to pass judgment on all that we do. If we are to run a tight ship, it is important that this legislation does not set up something that can get out of hand. As I said, those who elect us only have one vote to judge us on everything from the way the Post Office is run to foreign policy, energy policy and everything else that goes on in this country. It is important that we have control over the various institutions, semi-judicial bodies, Crown corporations and so on.

It is impossible for Members of Parliament to keep track of everything on a day to day basis. I refer to some of the powers being given to Canagrex. I refer to page 6 of the bill:

—Canagrex may

- (a) purchase agricultural products and food products and package, process, store . . .
- (b) undertake and assist in promotion of the use of Canadian agricultural products . . .
- (c) enter into contracts with Canadian companies, co-operatives, . . . or other Canadian enterprises or with individuals carrying on business in Canada . . .
- (d) enter into contracts with foreign governments . . .
- (e) enter into joint ventures with government . . .
- (f) make, on the recommendation of the Minister and subject to conditions of general application . . . grants and contributions for the purposes for which it is established.
- (g) purchase, lease or otherwise acquire and hold real and personal property . . .
- (i) pledge, mortgage, hypothecate, sell, lease or otherwise deal with—

This bill gives very wide-ranging powers to Canagrex. Directors will be appointed as follows:

All directors, other than the president, shall be appointed by the governor in council to hold office during pleasure for such terms, not exceeding three years—

Another part of the paragraph describes the sequence in which the directors shall be appointed. When you give that kind of wide-ranging power and you give the government the power to appoint directors, there should be a better accountability to Parliament.

If the democratic system is to work properly, we are the ones to be held accountable for the operations of the government. I agree with the hon. member for Humboldt-Lake Centre (Mr. Althouse) who spoke on the bill last Monday. He is concerned about the way the books will be audited.

I would like to see much more authority and latitude given to the Auditor General to look at the operations of Canagrex. I suspect the minister will agree that, in order to be effective, it has to have some autonomy. This could lead to a problem. It can be given too much autonomy. The bill provides that the Canagrex Corporation can have contingent liabilities of \$75 million. I suspect that if it is successful, that will be used up very quickly. The situation could quickly develop where it is dealing with hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money. We must be very careful to ensure there is a proper chain of authority and responsibility flowing back to this chamber.

We intend to raise some of these concerns in committee. I hope there will be an automatic reporting procedure to the House and to the committee so that we do not have to wait. I must confess that I am not too familiar with the rules of this House. I am not sure whether I need to apologize for that because the longer I am here, the more I realize that nobody understands all the rules of this House. However, there should be some procedure set up so that the annual report of Canagrex is immediately referred to the agriculture committee without the necessity of a House reference from the government or the President of the Privy Council.

In my brief experience as a Member of Parliament I have already seen problems with the agriculture committee getting people who should be there simply because the government does not want to provide a reference so that the appropriate witnesses can appear. There should be some mechanism in the bill to refer the report so members of the committee can examine the performance of the Canagrex Corporation without any interference by the government of the day, regardless of which party is in power. I am sure that those knowledgeable in agriculture in this country and the way agriculture works internationally would be very much in favour of that.

Canagrex is but one part of a very large industry in Canada. If Canagrex is going to work, why was it not set up a long time ago? It could have been effective in helping in our export markets. We now belatedly have a beef import law. We are very pleased to have it, but it would have been more effective had we had it ten years ago. There is no reason why that could not have been done a long time ago.

I now want to talk about the problems facing the beef industry. I have copies here of the minister's agri-food strategy for the eighties and challenge for growth as well as a copy of the main report and summary. The minister talks about increasing beef production in this country as a means of