

Canagrex

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): The Chair has extended time to the Hon. Minister because of the frequent points of order. I would invite another Hon. Member to rise.

Mr. Terry Sargeant (Selkirk-Interlake): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak on this very important Bill. I hope to return the level of the debate to some form of sanity, because while it has been rather interesting it has been somewhat disappointing to hear some of the ridiculous statements that have been made from all sides.

I was especially surprised at some of the comments made by my friend, the Hon. Member for Lethbridge-Foothills (Mr. Thacker), who has since left the House briefly. He talked about the Liberal and NDP alliance. The Hon. Member for Lethbridge-Foothills is a relatively intelligent person whom I know reasonably well. We attended French classes together for a number of months when I first came here. Indeed, I might point out that if my colleague, the Hon. Member for Comox-Powell River (Mr. Skelly), was correct in suggesting that the Hon. Member is gearing up for a last minute bid for the leadership of his Party, I would suggest he has probably the third or fourth best capability of any of the candidates to speak the second language of this country.

Since the Hon. Member talked about the Liberal NDP alliance, I wanted to point out to him that during the life of this Parliament the Conservative Party has voted with the Liberal Government twice as often as the NDP has voted with the Government. Let me also point out the kind of legislation on which the Conservatives have supported the Liberals. They support the Liberals when it is in the interest of the banks in Canada, the oil companies in Canada and big business. When legislation deals with removing collective bargaining for many workers in this country how do they vote then?

Mr. Skelly: Still with the Liberals.

Mr. Sargeant: Still with the Liberals. When it comes to removing clauses from Government legislation that remove collective bargaining for workers in this country, the Conservatives certainly do not vote with this Party in opposition to the Government. The Hon. Member for Lethbridge-Foothills also said that we were selling out the West by supporting Canagrex.

Mr. Malone: That is right.

Mr. Sargeant: I would point out to my friend, the Hon. Member for Crowfoot (Mr. Malone), that this piece of legislation has the support of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, which represents 300,000 farmers in this country. It has the support of the wheat pools in western Canada, which represent virtually every wheat grower in western Canada.

Who is selling out the West with this piece of legislation? Who has held it up for some three years now? The Conservative Party is selling out the West.

My friend, the Hon. Member for Lethbridge-Foothills, said that he was fearful of Canagrex growing and that it might become too big. What is wrong with that if Canagrex grows and helps farmers? Why are we here if not to help the people

of this country? There is no single group in Canada which needs help more than farmers.

I am perplexed over the position the Conservative Party has taken to this piece of legislation. Today they are attempting to remove the buy and sell provisions in the Bill. According to Conservative logic, they would set up a company like Air Canada then take away its right to fly.

Let me review the history of this Bill to see how it has progressed over the three years it has been delayed by the Conservatives. This Bill began rather innocently when the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) asked for unanimous consent to waive the normal 48 hours' notice needed to introduce new Bills in the House. He wanted to bring it forward in order to discuss it with agricultural Ministers and representatives at an agricultural outlook conference in the fall or early winter of 1981.

At the time, the Conservatives greeted this Bill with enthusiasm. Indeed, the then House Leader of that Party, the now temporary, soon to be former, Opposition Leader (Mr. Nielsen), had this to say:

● (1610)

Madam Speaker, we on this side are delighted to give our consent to the introduction of an idea initiated by the Honourable Member for Elgin (Mr. Wise) when he was in office. We in this Party express our gratitude to the Minister for perpetuating the idea of the Honourable Member for Elgin in this legislation.

Actually, the Hon. Member for the Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) at that time was not exactly correct in his comments on the origins of Canagrex. It was really the Ontario Federation of Agriculture that pushed to have an export agency for farm products created by the federal Government.

We in this Party have supported Canagrex since the beginning. However, we have been mindful of problems with it. We have been mindful of past abuses perpetuated particularly by the present Government. We have put in certain riders. We want to ensure that Canagrex really does benefit the farmers in the long run. One idea is that we insist Canagrex be controlled by the producers. It must be staffed by qualified professionals, not Liberal hacks. Canagrex must not get into the business of pushing inappropriate exports to the Third World that diminish those countries' abilities to be self-reliant. All of these concerns are matters largely of policy, not legislation.

I go back to some of the initial speeches in the House that were very supportive of this legislation from all three Parties when the Bill was first introduced. I am told that my friend, the Hon. Member for Provencher (Mr. Epp), who happens to be my neighbour in Manitoba, was rather supportive of Canagrex and suggested at the time it would probably help a group of farmers in his constituency who were having difficulty selling plane loads of calves to the State of Israel. He looked forward to the establishment of Canagrex because it would help his constituents sell their produce abroad. At that time the Hon. Member for Elgin (Mr. Wise) criticized the Minister