

Canagrex Act

past we were aware that we had excellent food products but, unfortunately, we waited for the buyers to come to us. But this is no longer the case. In the 1980s and in the years to come, we will use Canagrex increasingly and it will become the true promoter of Canadian agricultural produce and products.

This prompts me to say that if we succeed as promoters we will be able indeed to shore up our agricultural food industry which employs hundreds of thousands of Canadians. We will also achieve a better trade balance thanks to our agricultural production, and our processing industry will grow stronger still. Another significant aspect is that our agricultural research will become even more sophisticated. We will be able to earmark additional funds to develop improved and better yielding varieties and to enhance the genetics of our herds. Mr. Speaker, time flies by and I would have a lot more to say about what Canagrex might be, because I have mentioned only a few of the numerous and challenging opportunities likely to stem from the establishment of that corporation. I hope that my colleagues do realize the urgency of such a corporation for Canadian exports. Canada can no longer do without the services of all our producers and all of them would stand to derive great benefits from it. As I pointed out earlier, the whole country could also benefit by way of a greater income and a wider trade network and by offsetting our trade deficit. I hope that all those who are anxious to promote the agricultural development of our country will join in a common effort to ensure that the corporation is set up as soon as possible.

● (1540)

[English]

Mr. Charles Mayer (Portage-Marquette): Mr. Speaker, I agree, along with the hon. member who previously spoke, that the bill is of some significance to agriculture; but most of all, agriculture is of importance to the country. It is unfortunate that this government does not see fit to recognize how important agriculture is to the country.

I am glad to see that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) is in the chamber this afternoon because there are some things that I want to say to him about the bill and, more particularly, about the kind of general condition of agriculture today. This government does not give very much of a priority to agriculture. Let me just refer to the bill, for instance. Reference was made to it in the throne speech of April 14, 1980. Almost two years ago, the throne speech stated:

To improve the ability of Canadian industry to compete abroad in order to create jobs at home, my government will establish a national trading corporation.

We assume that the national trading corporation referred to in the throne speech is Bill C-85, the Canagrex legislation which is in front of us this afternoon. We wanted to do that almost two years ago. Eleven months ago, on February 20, 1981, the minister issued a press release which stated:

Mr. Whelan said he will soon submit legislation to Parliament to establish Canagrex.

He was given the green light by cabinet to set up Canagrex. If a green light meant that 11 months would pass before such

legislation came before the House, I would hate to know what a red or amber light would mean to this government. If there was any kind of clout the minister could have used at cabinet meetings, he either did not use it or did not have it, because 11 months later we have the Canagrex legislation. It is now being touted as very important legislation that will be of help. Why, then, was it not given some priority a long time ago? Why was it not dealt with in this House before?

● (1550)

I suggest that the Standing Committee on Agriculture is a well-run and in many cases non-partisan committee. That committee did not have anything to do for the first four months of 1981. In fact, it did not meet. If this legislation is so important, I am sure there would have been agreement on all sides to give it quick second reading so that it could have gone to committee. This government did not see fit to do that. Therefore, we should let Canadian farmers know how this government considers agriculture.

Something else I find interesting is what the minister has been saying about banks. I refer to what is going on in our domestic industry. It is fine to have programs which encourage Canadian agriculture to export. However, if in the meantime our domestic industry dies and there is no farm production at home, it is a moot point whether there will be any benefit by encouraging exports when there is nothing to export.

The Minister of Agriculture has been running around this country saying that the banks are behaving scandalously. In one speech that was well covered by the media, he suggested that the banks could be sued for the kind of lending practices they were following. That seems to be erroneous when this minister supports his cabinet colleague, the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen), who is responsible for the high interest rate policy in this country. If the minister wants to talk about suing somebody and doing something for farmers, he should tell the Minister of Finance to do something about these high interest rates. Then we could have some faith in him.

I now want to deal with a more specific matter. Last evening there was a vote in this chamber. One of the votes was on a subamendment which in part read:

—an excess profits tax be imposed on Canada's chartered banks to restore their marginal tax rate to the 1970 level.

The Minister of Agriculture has been running around the country talking about how terrible the banks are, stating that they should be sued because of the scandalous way they have been lending money to farmers. One would have expected him to vote in favour of that resolution. But how did he vote? He voted against it. He voted with the banks.

If one is going to have any credibility with regard to what one says, one should have the courage in this case to stand up and vote according to what one is telling the farmers as to how the banks are treating them. Many people in this country believe that agriculture is in as bad a shape as it was in the thirties. Fortunately, I did not have an opportunity to experience that first-hand because I was born in the middle of the