

*Canagrex*

actually start to assist farmers facing serious financial difficulties?

We are disappointed that the Government brought back this Bill. We believe that this Crown corporation has a valuable place in our agricultural export promotional scheme. We do not believe that the massive committee structures about which the Minister has talked are nearly as flexible, given the variety of assistance required to meet the complex situations involved in agricultural commodity exports in a world which is increasingly competitive. There is much pressure from countries around the world with flexible, effective organizations and instruments for handling agricultural exports.

We oppose the Bill. We hope the Government will make up its mind not to pass it and to leave the Canagrex organization and the legislation in place to be used at an appropriate time. It has a useful role to play in Canadian agriculture and in Canadian agricultural exports.

**Mr. Vic Althouse (Humboldt—Lake Centre):** Madam Speaker, as a lead-in to agri-food week this is a rather pathetic effort on the part of the Government. However, I will attempt to address the Bill before us.

I am somewhat at a loss. Having listened to some Members who are now on the government side of the House, and knowing what they thought about the Canagrex legislation, I point out that we are not dealing with a piece of legislative nicety today; we are not cleaning up the books on the racks, so to speak. More of something in the nature of an Irish wake is what the government members have in mind. I do not really know how to behave at a wake having come from a central and northern European background, Madam Speaker. I have not had any experience on how to conduct myself at wakes or even what is expected at a wake. Yet I perceive, on listening to statements made by government Members in and out of the House, that what they see in their mind's eye with this piece of legislation is Canagrex draped in some great box in the middle of the Chamber. I think some of them even see Canagrex as a rather large Irish pixie or elf with a scowl on his face and his hands crossed over his chest covered by a great green stetson hat. They are hoping to bury this particular apparition and set it out Lord knows where.

● (1540)

Because we do not know where the Government is intending to take us or what it is proposing to do, it seems ironic that for agri-food week one of the first and perhaps the only thing that will be done, initiated by the Government, is to put to rest a corpse that became a corpse on November 8, 1984 when the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) stood in this House and announced unbeknownst to the Canagrex board, staff or the farming community that it would no longer be alive after that date.

**Mr. Malone:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Althouse:** The Member says hear, hear. That is part of the mentality with which the House, the country and the farming community have had to contend on this issue. Despite the presentation of the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise) today, I think there were a number of things, with the activity the Government took with regard to Canagrex, that showed all too clearly from where this Government was coming. After telling the country for months that it was a caring Government, that it was going to be a consultative and a responsible Government, this little agency, fledgling that it was, a little furry monster maybe a few months old, was unceremoniously clubbed to death on November 8. There was no meeting of the Minister with the board, no announcement to the directors or to the staff. There was no discussion as to what Canagrex had done. The Minister and his ministry have not even done an assessment of the organization. It was simply decided apparently in the Ministry of Finance that Canagrex would no longer live, and so it died. Today we are being asked to bury the remains and forget that farmers need, in spite of the death of Canagrex, many of the facilities and services this agency was designed to provide.

The Minister in his speech pointed out that he has continued to use External Affairs to make inquiries about the potential for agricultural trade. He has continued to use the Export Development Corporation which is able to provide grants and contributions for agricultural exports, something very difficult to get before. We assume that this is an improvement. He is saying that within his own Department he now has an export information centre for those groups, individuals and agencies that are interested in attempting to export some of their product. He is telling us that he hopes that his Department of Agriculture will co-ordinate and co-operate in the development of trade in agricultural products.

Without going over the same ground, I think we did hear very much the same speech from a previous Minister of Agriculture, whose ghost I think we are trying to bury today, when he talked about Canagrex. There was a very real problem in getting the various Departments and branches of Government together when a farmer or group of farmers wanted to get together a product for export to another country. They had to work through three different Departments of Government. These groups, usually fledgling themselves, had to find a market for a product fairly new to them, but they did not have the kind of financing and background by way of experience to carry it off quickly. Canagrex was supposed to be a gathering point, a listening post and a point where producers, through their co-operatives, their growers' associations, as individuals or processors, could say: "Here, we are expecting to have X number of tonnes of product for surplus to be sold out of the country in the next year or two, where are we likely to sell it? Where can we get the kind of technical information needed for shipping, financing, insurance and export guarantees that we will need in order to make these operations viable so we can expand the growing of peas and blueberries and the production of maple syrup and of honey? This whole host of products that in the scheme of things, in the over-all accounts