

Oral Questions

[English]

POWER OF PROPOSED CANAGREX CORPORATION

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, we have noted before with this pocket dictator of a Government—

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark:—that the weaker its case, the longer it takes it to defend its action. The Government knows that there have only been 90 minutes of debate at report stage. It knows that its own Members failed to show up to allow debate on this Bill the last time it was brought in. It knows that the Minister of Agriculture snuck into the House the other night and introduced closure by surprise, on Canagrex. What the Government House Leader has done is indicate that he holds in contempt the spirit of Parliamentary reform that was marked when Members from all sides of the House adopted the first report of the Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure, and that will not be forgotten.

Let me ask whomever is speaking for the Government as Acting Prime Minister whether the Government believes, and why this Government believes, that this Crown corporation needs the extraordinary power to buy and sell agricultural products, and why it refuses to allow that principle to be discussed here in the House of Commons of Canada?

[Translation]

Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker, I think the Leader of the Opposition will agree that one would have to be very narrow-minded to conclude that limiting debate at this point constitutes an attack against the spirit of parliamentary reform, on the contrary. The Right Hon. Member ought to know that the reform proposals provide for a parliamentary calendar, with set dates for adjournment. It will therefore become even more vital for parties to meet in good faith and try to negotiate agreements on the length of debate on certain bills, if the House really wants this experiment to be fruitful and to pave the way for permanent reform. What we are doing today in no way affects the spirit of parliamentary reform, and I think the Right Hon. Member's party, in refusing to agree to time allocation with a view to ending the debate on Canagrex, is in fact against the spirit of parliamentary reform. The Leader of the Opposition knows perfectly well that the House will adjourn on December 22. This is the first time in our history that Hon. Members have been informed three weeks ahead of time that the House will be adjourning on a given date for the Christmas holidays. Nevertheless, the Leader of the Opposition is doing everything in his power to keep the Government from expediting its legislation within a reasonable length of time. The fact that the Minister of Agriculture was obliged to give notice, as he did yesterday, means that the Leader of the Opposition failed to show the parliamentary co-operation required to conclude an agreement on a reasonable length of

time for ending the debate on this very important Canagrex Bill.

• (1420)

[English]

AUDITOR GENERAL'S COMMENTS ON CROWN CORPORATIONS

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, the Government House Leader will have a hard time explaining how it was the attitude of the Opposition that stopped his own Members from being able to show up in this House of Commons to debate Canagrex. They would rather boycott the House and then invoke closure, which is what they have done.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: I see that the dictator-in-chief has returned.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Clark: Let me ask the Prime Minister—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Clark: Perhaps Members opposite would like to impose closure on the question period as well.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: Can the Prime Minister tell us whether the Government intends to ignore the Auditor General's report and recommendations about the abuse of Crown corporations generally, or does he intend to ignore it simply and exclusively in the case of Canagrex?

[Translation]

Hon. Yvon Pinard (President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker, if I may finish my answer to the question put by the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition, he twice alluded to the fact that at a given time, there were not enough Liberal Members in the House to debate the Canagrex Bill. This reminds me that we tried twice over to call the Bill for debate, and twice the party of the Leader of the Opposition used childish tactics to prevent the debate from taking place. In fact, the occasion to which he is referring, namely, when a large number of Liberal Members were present but not in sufficient numbers to make a quorum, there were more than twenty Conservative Members hiding behind the curtains like a bunch of kids to prevent Parliament from working. Madam Speaker, since we are talking about the spirit of parliamentary reform, not about infantile behaviour, I suggest that the Leader of the Opposition consult the real lawyer sitting on his left, who will tell him that he urged me, in the present circumstances, to limit the debate because there was no way agreement could be reached on a specific deadline for concluding the debate on Canagrex.