

In my part of the country, the Regina plains, there has always been an important role for co-operation, from the early days when settlers came and helped each other build their farms to the present day of marketing their produce through the largest producer co-op in the world, the wheat pool.

The government has always played an important role. It helped settlers establish themselves on the prairies, guaranteeing transportation and marketing systems, all the way through to developing better strains of wheat and other crops. Of course, there is the private initiative of the farmers, taking the risks, adapting different crops to varying soil conditions and so forth. In short, the individual farmer makes the types of individual decisions that no large organization, whether it be a large, central state-planning bureau or the boardroom of a multinational firm, can ever make.

For my Conservative friends to suggest, as they often seem to do, that we can get along without the involvement of the public sector is sheer madness. Surely we cannot do without public support and involvement, orderly marketing, co-operative and collective action by our farmers. To suggest that we can is foolishness and madness.

The whole trend towards privatization and what I feel is overplaying the importance of the private sector was driven home to me last week when I had the opportunity of looking at the American space program. In the present atmosphere in Washington, there is a strong desire to have the data collected from the remote-sensing satellites turned over to the private sector. The data available from the pictures taken by the satellites tells what crop conditions will be like, the maturing process of the crops and how much crop can be expected at harvest time. For this type of information to be turned over to the private sector for its exclusive use is a frightening indication that the public sector is no longer considered to be important. I am sure an outfit like Cargill Corporation would love to have monopoly control over such data so that it can corner and control the commodity market. This I mention as an indication of the inappropriateness of having the entire agricultural sector turned over to private industry.

In my view, Bill C-85 is a way for government to make an important contribution in supporting our agricultural community. Of course, it has to be done in a co-operative manner. For the government to set something up and attempt to jam it down the throats of individual farmers is unacceptable to those in this party, as it would be unacceptable to members of the Conservative party and the farmers of this country. The key, of course, is co-operation. We need co-operation between the public sector, the private sector and the operators, in mutual assistance with each other. Whatever role the three sectors play, only through co-operation with each other can agriculture remain a healthy industry in our economy. Only through that co-operation can our farmers be assured that what they produce will be sold at decent prices.

● (1410)

There are a number of fears which we have about this bill. One of those fears has to do with the composition of the board.

### *Canagrex Act*

I suggest to the government that this co-operative principle is essential if this new organization which will be created by Bill C-85 is to flourish and do the proper job for which it was envisioned. Canagrex must co-operate with the farmers, those growing the crops, along with the workers in the industry. Therefore, we suggest strongly that the producers, farmers and workers should have an input as to who sits on the board.

We are concerned about the fact that the budget for Canagrex is only \$12.3 million and not the \$60 million which the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) earlier promised. Is this an indication that what is really before us is a window-dressing attempt by the government to make it appear that it is actively trying to export our farm produce? Is a budget of \$12.3 million adequate for this new corporation to do its job properly? These are some of our doubts. In time, I am sure that the track record of this new corporation will show whether it is just window dressing or whether it is the real intention of the government to become active in this area.

We are also concerned about the capabilities of Canagrex. We believe that Canagrex should become a promotional body and a source of specialized information about the trading of agricultural products. In this way it can be of assistance to the farmers. All too often, farmers cannot wade through the various regulations, departments and agencies which exist. If Canagrex is able to offer these various services to farmers in a simplified manner, it will be performing a useful function.

Another disturbing factor about government involvement in programs such as these is the fact that time and again public money is used to develop new markets or new products, and when profits are finally realized the government turns around and offers them to the private sector. Very often this is the larger component of the private sector. If Canagrex becomes profitable in the future, we suggest that those profits be returned to the farmers and not turned over to some multinational corporation. This is something which we will be watching very closely in the years to come. If Canagrex in fact turns out to be a handmaiden for the large food distributors in the agri-business that has been created, the government will hear more criticism from us about Canagrex.

It is our hope that Canagrex will provide service and assistance to farmers for their benefit. At this point I would like to point out the importance of developing new markets within Canada. Other members have mentioned the eroding state of food self-sufficiency in which Canada finds itself. Indeed, we are importing more produce every year. For example, in 1970, 83 per cent of all the vegetables consumed in Canada were produced here. By 1977 it had dropped to 74 per cent. That is a decline of 9 per cent.

This same fact is true for fruit. In the period 1967 to 1971, 32 per cent of the fruit consumed in Canada was grown here. In 1977, that had dropped to 24 per cent. An example of this is canned peaches. Only 18 per cent of the canned peaches which are consumed in Canada are produced here. I think that the ideal of Canadian self-sufficiency in food is important. It is an ideal that I hope Canagrex will address itself to.