

Canagrex

first year—in which it sold over \$16 million worth of farm products and with another \$160 million under consideration—the Minister would be prepared to reconsider his decision. Evidently the Minister was already locked in and could not give a favourable reply, as much as his heart would have moved him in that direction.

The Hon. Member for Algoma also asked the Minister of Agriculture why it is that when the United States and the European Economic Community countries are more aggressive in marketing and selling agricultural commodities we are shutting down the one organization that was set up to sell our commodities abroad. That was a very good question and a very relevant one. I suppose the Hon. Member asked the question in the hope that somehow or other the Government might reconsider this measure. As is his custom, the Minister of Agriculture gave a very diplomatic answer. He said that he wanted to make it clear that the Government would follow very aggressively the export market for agricultural commodities. He went on to say that the Government was satisfied, given the very dismal record of Canagrex—words which come as a surprise to me in light of what the Hon. Member for Algoma reported to him—that it can be done far more successfully, efficiently and effectively with officials in his Department. That reply really floored me. It is obvious that one cannot be more effective and more efficient on the same budgetary basis without creating a separate agency that will promote a specific purpose. That is what we do in many walks of life, especially in terms of discharging other public responsibilities. I am sure that in a quiet hour the Minister of Agriculture would agree that it would be more effective to do this outside the Department. I say this not because there is something wrong with the Department. Evidently, if there is a task-oriented agency which focuses on exports it can produce much more than some agency buried on the sixteenth floor which is in competition with many other occupations. The fact is that the number of officials available in any given Department has suffered very badly under the Tory administration.

The logic of this move is very unconvincing. Therefore, the Bill before us to dissolve Canagrex is one that leaves us at a bit of a loss in terms of understanding what the main purpose of the Government is. Does it want to reduce the deficit? If so, I think that it is penny wise but pound foolish. In this move it is forgoing an opportunity. It is dismantling something that could be very useful in the long term.

Why do I say that? I am convinced that, in the pursuit of regional economic development, we have to ensure, among other things, that the products of the regions, outside Quebec and Ontario in particular, because that is where the development has to take place, and their ability to thrive is essential. No one will disagree with that. As a city slicker not very knowledgeable about the details of agriculture, but nevertheless capable of putting two and two together, it seems to me that one important way of promoting regional economy—in regions which need it—would be to put in place an effective agency that would help the export of certain products that are

agricultural and regional at the edges of the country. I refer to potatoes in Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, and tree fruit in British Columbia. I refer to lentils and peas in Alberta, canola oil in the Prairies and evaporated milk from I-don't-know-where. There is a long list of commodities that one could produce to make a very powerful case in favour of Canagrex, in favour of this specialized agency whose dismantling we are now debating.

To retain the services of Canagrex would help the task of strengthening the agricultural economies of these provinces. So it happens that a good idea which had already been put into initial practice is disappearing. As my colleague, the Hon. Member for Algoma, has already said, we on this side of the House express our regret at its passing. It is to the credit of Eugene Whelan that this idea was launched. It was my understanding that at that time the idea was supported by small, medium and large-sized agricultural producers in many parts of the country. The idea of opening a new chapter of endeavour to make Canada more competitive abroad in a highly and increasingly competitive market situation and to adopt certain models that have been proven to be successful in other nations are ideas that appeal to everyone. I regret to say that it seems to me that we are falling back and going into the past. We are not seizing an opportunity and are not moving with the times.

● (1640)

It would not have cost the Government very much to recognize a good idea. It has recognized many good ideas of ours. Quite rightly, it adopted all our measures dealing with acid rain. In the end, these measures will serve the public interest.

The Government should have realized that Canagrex makes sense. Government Members should have realized that Canagrex is something they would want to pursue in order to give more help to the economies of the poorer regions and to keep us competitive. Instead, they gave it up. That is most regrettable.

I join with my colleague, the Hon. Member for Algoma, in expressing the views of the Official Opposition on this matter. We thought that Canagrex would have put Canada on the export markets map and would have given us an opportunity, in increasingly difficult trade times, to have an edge which we otherwise would not have.

Mr. Blenkarn: Madam Speaker, I wonder if the Hon. Member is really speaking on behalf of the Liberal Party and is indicating that the Liberal Party does not believe in the role of private enterprise in marketing products. Clearly the Canadian Commercial Corporation is a vehicle for marketing products to countries that believe in state ownership of the means of production and distribution. That corporation can handle that.

Is it the view of the Liberal Party that the only way we can properly market our products is by turning over the marketing