

Canagrex

made available more readily to the Crown corporation than to the private sector. I find that a very disturbing kind of question and dilemma which is associated with this bill. It is disturbing from the point of view that the private sector is in business to make a profit and they pay taxes on that profit. Those taxes fund the government. So you could find yourself in a situation where the government was using taxes derived from the private sector to take unfair advantage in the marketplace. It is a very serious question which needs to be answered and it was not answered to my satisfaction and that of most of the members on this side, in the extensive airing the bill had in committee. So if the government is really interested in proceeding with this bill and doing what is right for Canadian agriculture, I would certainly urge it to accept not only this amendment but the rest of the amendments you grouped together, Mr. Speaker. I believe they were Nos. 1, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11. They all have to do with the buying and selling as far as the Crown corporation is concerned. That would certainly signal to the agricultural community that the government is not as interested as it was in getting directly involved in the export of their products.

There are some other amendments, Mr. Speaker, having to do with better management, a sunset clause, a better accounting system as far as reporting back to the House is concerned, and those kinds of things. But the main objection we have to the bill is the fact that it will allow the government, because of the widespread powers in Clause 14, to willy-nilly get into the agricultural commodity export business. Let me sum up by saying I think the government has a responsibility to Canadian agriculture. By and large, as far as the export of agricultural commodities is concerned, I think it has been doing a fairly good job, but I submit the main responsibility it has is to create and maintain a healthy economic climate at home so that our producers can remain competitive. After all, the thing that is going to sell our agricultural products is price. If we can remain competitive and offer an assured supply at a fair price, that is basically what is needed to maintain and increase our agricultural exports. That should be the main preoccupation of this government and this minister.

Mr. Stan J. Hovdebo (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this bill tonight. I also appreciate following the hon. member for Portage-Marquette (Mr. Mayer) who always seems to present his arguments in such a reasonable fashion.

After a couple of hundred years of the existence of agriculture in Canada we have a nation which is very dependent on agriculture and where it is still a major industry. But over that period of time things have changed considerably from a basic approach of survival where the farmer raised what he could for himself and helped to keep his neighbour alive by selling or trading with him, to that point where agriculture is a major part of the Canadian economy. It has become one of the most important factors in our world trade. For example, our exports of agricultural products in the period from 1971 to 1975 were about \$3 billion. By 1980 they reached \$7.8 billion, and have of course increased since then. That represents an increase of

about 261 per cent. It is also very important to note that our surplus of agricultural products exported over those imported is more than \$2.7 billion. Compare that with our over-all surplus and our balance of trade for 1980 of \$5.25 billion. Agricultural products represented over 50 per cent of the total trade surplus, while accounting for only 10 per cent of our total trade in dollars. That is a pretty good record which the agricultural industry has built up over the years.

The bill, Mr. Speaker, is an attempt by the government to increase that expansion still further. However, I have some worries about this bill and the approach the government has taken to agriculture. The government does not deal with some of the real concerns of the farmers, concerns which every member of this House recognizes and is aware of. Indirectly, possibly, the development of a corporation to increase farm exports would really be worthwhile. But it is interesting to note that this bill has taken a long time to get through this House. First reading was on December 8, 1981. Second reading started on January 25, 1982, and we are now only at the report stage. Part of the reason for this situation is that the official opposition have spent a lot of time on this bill in committee, in fact approximately six months. This is a little surprising when you look at the initial support the official opposition gave to the bill. For example, I will quote from a speech by the hon. member for Elgin (Mr. Wise) who said, speaking of the bill on January 25:

• (2100)

I welcome it because it is at least an indication that this government at long last is showing some interest for the time being in the promotion of agriculture or the sale of agricultural products. I wonder why it took some ten months, from February to December, to prepare this legislation when farm organizations and farm leaders have been requesting this type of scheme for at least five or six years. I can recall my first introduction to the Canagrex concept when it was brought to the attention of our caucus back in 1973.

He goes on to say:

It should also be noted that even the February 20 announcement came one year after the 1980 election, and in that campaign Canagrex formed a very integral and important part of the Liberal Party's agricultural platform. If this government had acted upon this promise a year and a half ago and had given priority to increasing agricultural exports, then our agricultural industry might not be experiencing the same severe economic distress which plagues it today.

That is a very concise statement indicating the kind of support that we need for some form of push to be given to exports if we are going to increase our agriculture structure by exports.

Part of the reason for this delay was also caused by the rather antiquated procedures by which bills are brought into the House and are passed by it. For instance, if the official opposition and even members of the government had had the opportunity to make suggestions to this bill before it was drafted, I am sure that it would not have taken nearly as long to get through committee stage. The only weapon the opposition has in changing a bill is, I suppose, delay. It is very unfortunate because that is exactly what the official opposition did. The bill was delayed by the official opposition to make amendments which may have been unnecessary had this House