

Government Orders

action that he is ignoring the interests of the farmers who are, in fact, his very neighbours.

Similarly the government's initiative in the budget to cut all funds for branch line rehabilitation, even those rail lines like those in my constituency where there had already been a public investment in upgrading the road bed, putting down ballasts and putting down ties when all they needed was heavy steel. The government said that it is going to waste the money which has been invested in that till now by not adding the little bit of additional money that it takes to put on heavy steel.

That just perpetuates even more the rationalization of the grain handling system which had been occurring over the last number of years and has in fact been hastened, with all due respect, by my colleagues from the Liberal benches. The removal of the Crow rate was certainly a factor in the rationalization of that railway system. Nevertheless, no matter whose fault it was, it has occurred, which means that people who live on the railway mainlines which are the ones that get all the investment and all the attention have elevators and local delivery points to which they can deliver virtually at any time, because those trains are moving through there every day taking grain out of those elevators. However, the people who live off those lines on branch lines, especially in communities where there are no more branch lines and are already hauling a long way, do not have a similar delivery option.

The minister is saying to farmers who live far away from the main lines—and we are talking here in some cases of hundreds of miles—that they have much less of an opportunity to sell their grain and to pocket the money for their grain at the time of harvest and to make a quick delivery than do people who live far away from the branch lines.

• (1250)

I know my time is starting to run out here, but there is one more point that I would like to make in relation to the minister's comments.

The minister from time to time has talked about, has in fact asserted, that farmers are clamouring for this bill to be passed, indicating I suppose that he has been in some kind of consultation with the farmers. That is the farthest thing from the truth. This government's record

on consultation in the agriculture field is just dismal and getting worse.

Certainly we saw that earlier in this session when this whole issue of taking oats out of the Wheat Board came forward. There were even polls done by the Conservatives own pollsters, Allan Gregg and Decima Research, which indicated that 70 per cent of the farmers did not agree with the minister's initiative on that particular matter. Farmers, including many good Conservatives, stood up by the hundreds at meetings all over the prairies out and out condemning the government's initiative, but the government never listened at all.

In this case we have documented here not only some of the large organizations like the Saskatchewan Wheat Board, the National Farmers Union and the Federation of Agriculture, but even the very organizations that supported the government on free trade and supported it on taking oats out of the Wheat Board, organizations like the Western Canadian Wheat Growers and the Canola Growers. They have out and out condemned this legislation. They are not calling on the opposition to let this thing go through quickly. They are calling on the government to stop this legislation in its tracks and bring back the old bill whereby they can have cash advances immediately, interest free. All those organizations are calling on the government to do that, but the minister is not listening.

In conclusion, can the minister identify one other sector in the economy in which this government totally ignores opinion in the farm community right across the country, across the political spectrum? Is there any other sector where the ministry so totally ignores the opinion of farmers and their representatives as the government has on this particular measure? I invite the minister to respond to that.

Mr. Milliken: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Prince Albert—Churchill River has made a very eloquent address and indeed his summary of the events leading up to the introduction of this bill was erudite, succinct and extremely accurate.

I think he will agree with me when I say it showed the fumbling and bumbling that has characterized this government in its failure to get the legislation in order. It adjourns the House and then expects us having had a lengthy adjournment to rush back and pass everything with no debate and to allow this kind of dreadful legislation through without proper discussion. The hon.