

*Government Orders*

The longshoremen appeared before us. They are very concerned because their workers are losing jobs. They have workers with families who are trying to make ends meet who simply do not have work. It is not because they do not want to work, it is not because they are not ready to work, it is simply because the jobs have disappeared because this government, without thinking, has removed a program and is affecting the livelihood of many people in Atlantic Canada.

• (1150)

The Canadian Wheat Board was before us and said that the loss of the ports of Halifax and Saint John will mean the loss of the only ice-free ports on the Atlantic seaboard. If those ports are lost it could mean the loss of sales. As the representative from the Canadian Wheat Board indicated, countries with warm climates and warm waters do not want to go up the St. Lawrence during the winter to the St. Lawrence River ports because they do not want to deal with the ice. In fact, they like the idea of coming to an ice-free port because they are not used to dealing with ice and they do not want to deal with it. If they have the choice of going to an ice-free port or dealing with the St. Lawrence River, they may well go somewhere else.

The Canadian Wheat Board has expressed that the loss of these ports takes away one marketing element that it uses. As we know, this country needs all the help it can get in marketing grain. The Canadian Wheat Board, which is an institution that has done wonders for the Canadian grain industry needs all the help it can get.

The issue boils down to the elevators at Saint John and Halifax. The question that must be asked is if the government is going to remove this program what is it going to put in its place? It has offered nothing. It did not listen to what the APTC had to say. It has offered nothing to put in its place.

I have found this experience very frustrating because the government, despite being hit over the head with information, ignored it and bullheadedly moved ahead with its agenda, which is not always clear to all Canadians.

One thing that was satisfying was that the work we in the New Democratic Party and others have done on this

bill has forced the government to recognize the devastating impact that this bill is going to have. As a result, it has appointed a study to look at the future viability of the elevators at the ports of Halifax and Saint John.

It is great that the government is concerned about the elevators at Halifax and Saint John. It is too bad that it would not have been interested about 18 months ago and looked at some real alternatives to this program so that today, instead of debating the demise of the elevator at Saint John and the potential closure of the elevator at Halifax, we could be debating the very logical and well thought out proposal put forth by the Atlantic Provinces Transportation Commission. A vast majority in each party in this House would favour that sort of proposal. Instead, the government is being bullheaded and is going ahead without any real thought for the consequences of its action.

It is only the work of members of this party, the Atlantic Provinces Transportation Commission and others, that has forced this government to realize that the passage of this bill will have a devastating impact on regional development. The promotion of agriculture in Atlantic Canada is important to its economy. At least we got the government to recognize that. It is really sad that the Saint John elevator is already closed. By the time this study is finished Halifax may be closed. Everything is in limbo. Everything is up in the air.

I want to remind the government that we have to keep in mind that regional development is an important factor in this country. It has been a factor since Confederation. If the government is not going to consider regional development, if it is going to consider only the bottom line, we are going to have problems in Atlantic Canada, Saskatchewan and other regions of the country that do not have a great population base but are part of this Confederation and deserve the consideration of this government.

In closing, I would like to remind the government that it has a duty to all regions of this country to make sure that there is a fair opportunity for all, to make sure that every Canadian, no matter where he or she may live in this country, has the opportunity to work, to raise a family, to make a living and to live in a way that is satisfactory to all of us in Canada.