

Government Orders

We heard from Mr. Russell. Mr. Russell says that if the Halifax grain terminal closes the agricultural industry will be put on its knees, and this all after the fact. The government states that it is going to study the impact. It is a little bit of face saving. It is trying to recover some of the negative publicity that it is getting from the sectors down there that are being devastated by this short-sighted piece of legislation.

My colleague has brought forward the three amendments that we are debating today. The effect of the amendments is to further save the government from its own devices, from its own incompetence in this particular case. The effect of the amendments is to make sure that the at and east grain subsidy is still in place for the next five years, so that the government has a chance to do what it should have done back in 1985 when the letter first went in with the proposals from the Atlantic Provinces Transportation Council, and that is to sit down and study the offsets.

It is not good enough, almost a year after it has cut the subsidy, to say that now it will look at the economic consequences. We know what they are. They are devastating. Once a flour mill or a grain terminal closes, or a farmer goes out of business in Atlantic Canada because he does not have access to the same-priced feed, it is too late six months after that to come and say, "My goodness, boys, we made a mistake. We should have put the offsets in before we took the subsidy away".

The other thing that is particular galling to me as a member from Atlantic Canada is that this government is still absolutely hell-bent, whenever it wants to cut, to snip down east first. I guess it wants to see whether, after all the cuts, we still have any blood left in us.

In effect, by putting this at and east legislation through, the government has cut over \$40 million. That sounds like a lot of money. The government said it had to get rid of subsidies in the interest of deficit reduction and better management. While I am not suggesting that it should impose cuts elsewhere, it did not treat the rest of the country and the rest of the transportation infrastructure the same way. It did not mention once that it was going to do anything with the Western Grain Transportation Act which has subsidized the movement of grains in the western part of Canada to the tune of over \$860 million. Once again, we from the east have to bear the brunt of this government's cuts.

In conclusion, I would urge those from the other side of this House who have listened to the impassioned plea of the Member for Annapolis Valley—Hants to do the right thing for once and vote in favour of these amendments or to defeat this bill.

Hon. Roger C. Simmons (Burin—St. George's): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to rise and speak for a few minutes on the report stage of Bill C-26, an Act to amend the Railway Act.

I rise principally in support of my colleague, the hon. member for Lambton—Middlesex, who knows infinitely more about this subject than I do and than do most members of this House. As a matter of fact, I would go so far as to say that he knows a fair amount more about it than the man who happens to be current minister responsible for this bill.

My colleague, the hon. member for Lambton—Middlesex was all too briefly Minister of Agriculture. Had he been able to stay there longer, this entire business would be in much better shape than it is in today.

I sense that some of the government members are rousing themselves to the importance of this particular bill, and that is encouraging. I say to my friends opposite that they would do well to have a look at today's Order Paper and to read the good sense which is embodied in the three amendments put forward by my friend from Lambton—Middlesex, the essence of which would be to delay this entire bill.

In the circumstances, it is a very good idea that we at least put this legislation on hold for four or five years. After all, let us keep in mind that in the last two or three weeks the government itself has seen fit to launch a study. Why prejudice the results of that study by acting precipitously here at this particular time? Why not follow the advice of my friend, the hon. member for Lambton—Middlesex, and put this whole proposal on hold, at least until we hear the results of the study, but more to the point until 1995.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Simmons: The member will realize that after we hear the study and there is some burning and pressing reason to move it forward, it is a very easy matter to bring a bill such as this back into the House. That is all these amendments would do today and I cannot see anybody wanting to vote against these three very sensible amendments.