

Government Orders

I, as one Canadian from Atlantic Canada, cannot accept Bill C-26 in its present form, especially with no assurance that there are going to be offsets, because we still have something from your neck of the woods, Mr. Speaker, and from the neck of the woods of my hon. friend from Regina—Lumsden. We still have something call the Western Grain Transportation Act which distorts the movement of grain to the tune of about \$850 million. I am aware of some of that history. I know there are some moves to try to reform and revise that, to perhaps give some of that money to the producers rather than paying it to the railways. There are many different things being discussed.

Well let us discuss them and try to define where we make the change. But is it fair to make the change on the little \$35 million in Bill C-26 that hits Atlantic Canada right in the gonads and not do anything to the Western Grain Transportation Act which affects the western farmers to the tune of \$850 million? That is not fair or equitable and that is why Bill C-26 should not be before this House at second reading until there is something done.

As I said earlier, we had the Atlantic Provinces Transportation Commission before the Transport Committee on February 22. They are so reasonable. In fact, I talked to the chairman afterwards and said that he most likely shot himself in both feet let alone knee-capping himself because he did not come out a little more critically of the fact that since 1985 there has been no response fundamentally to the proposals they put forward then for offsets. They were so reasonable that they said they had looked at some of those offsets and they think that perhaps they are not in the complete balance that should be applied, and they came up with another proposal. They came up with a proposal that removes the subsidy on an ongoing yearly basis and only ties it to the three winter months when, in effect, the St. Lawrence is closed and the Atlantic ports could still get the benefit of the flow of grain to the east as long as they got the subsidy to help pay the difference between the frozen rate and the compensatory rate that the railways would charge.

• (1540)

I just wanted to put on the record that this is much more than just a subsidy to be competitive with American ports. It is part of our national dimension. It is part of the fabric which keeps this country together. Mr. Pearson said many years ago in this Chamber that there is a price to pay to have a Canada. He was referring to the

questions about the cost of bilingualism. There are so many costs to keep this country together from coast to coast.

One of the little elements that helped us in Atlantic Canada was at and east. The Atlantic Provinces Transportation Commission, on its own without pressure from the federal government, came through with suggestions to reduce that subsidy to about \$10 million if there was movement on the offsets.

I want to put on the record what we are talking about when we talk about offsets. I understand that the problem is that there are four or five ministers involved and perhaps not one minister has tried to address this. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that those of us in Atlantic Canada cannot stay quiet anymore on this unless we have some assurance that those offsets are going to come into play.

I quoted Mr. Pickersgill who brought in the national transportation bill and then became the first chairman of the national transportation agency. That was a very good bill for him. But he did something good for Atlantic Canada on the at and east. For us to let that go and quietly wait for some action on the offsets is not correct for any of us from Atlantic Canada. It puts members on all sides, and especially the government side, in a very embarrassing position.

I am not talking about the moon. I am not talking about the expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars in terms of offsets. Do you know what I am talking about? I am talking about unit trains to move the export grain to Halifax and Saint John, the use of water transport for the shipment of Plan "C" feed grains to Atlantic Canada, the elimination of the countervail and duty on U.S. corn, provision of facilities to receive grain by water at Saint John, promotion of the continued use of Halifax for the shipment of export flour and provision of permits allowing the importation of feed grains from foreign countries. Just about all of those things involve not only two or three ministers of the government but—and this is fundamental—involve the co-operation and the action of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Often, for understandable reasons, to protect the credibility of our wheat, to make sure we had a hard durum that did not have imperfections and was not going to be diluted with soft grains, the Canadian Wheat Board, for so many years, has maintained that very proper control of the wheat trade. But there comes a time, when you are trying to help one area of the country, when quite frankly we do not need the Durum