

*Government Orders*

absolute disbelief and disrespect for this venerable institution, the House of Commons.

We, on the opposition side of the House, have listened to the pious mouthings on the other side, about how partisanship must be dropped in the best interests and the honour of the country. What happens today? Today five bills are being rammed through with the government's favourite Draconian measure, closure. This evening we will be forced to vote on these bills because of a total disregard for the history of this Chamber, for the tradition of British Parliaments and, most specifically, a contempt for the people who are represented by the members of this House.

I would like to get a little more specific. There is one bill among these five that is of particular interest to me as the member for Halifax, and indeed is of interest to all Atlantic Canadian members. I refer to that wonderful Bill C-26.

For those who are not quite so aware what Bill C-26 is about, let me refresh your memories. Bill C-26 is the bill that takes away the At and East grain subsidies, the subsidies to the Atlantic ports. Today in this House I heard the Minister of Transport say that this government would do everything possible, everything possible, to assist the beleaguered ports of Atlantic Canada, and particularly the port of my home city, Halifax.

The Port of Halifax has a long, honourable history. In 1749 Cornwallis founded that city. From 1749 until this government got its hands on it, the Port of Halifax thrived. Haligonians, because of their port and the spinoff from it, managed to survive in good times and bad. That is coming to an end because of the policy of this government.

For weeks now I and my colleague, the member for Dartmouth, have been pleading with the government to do something about the absolutely unacceptable situation in the Atlantic ports, and particularly the Port of Halifax. The unfairness of freight rates between Halifax and central Canada have been a rallying cry for Atlantic Canadians since Confederation.

We have talked a lot about what various people gave up when they entered into Confederation and what we sacrificed to become Canadians, what we are proud to have sacrificed to become Canadians, because being Canadian is, to us, the single most important facet of our

lives. Being Canadian is intrinsic to our existence. It is what we stand for, it is what we believe in.

However, we are human. We know what we gave up in Confederation. One of the things that we in Atlantic Canada gave up, and particularly in Halifax and Nova Scotia, was the thriving north-south trade. We gave it up because we said: "We want to be part of this country. This country is important to us, we are committed to it and we will stay committed to it".

Look at the polls. From then until now, who have been the strongest federalists in this country? Who are the ones who remain most strongly committed to the concept of Canada? Every time—and my colleague from Newfoundland knows this—they are Atlantic Canadians. Atlantic Canadians believe in this country, they want this country to succeed, despite the fact that governments, and most particularly this government, seem to take some perverse pleasure in kicking us when we are down.

• (1750 )

I refer again to the comments made today by the Minister of Transport. He said: "We will do all we can, all that is in our power". That is what he said. I heard him. You heard him, Mr. Speaker. You were there. He said: "We will do everything in our power to assist the Port of Halifax".

One of the things in the power of this government is to take Bill C-26 and consign it to the garbage can where it belongs. This bill has an interesting history. On July 15, 1989 the At and East subsidy was cancelled, flat out cancelled without legislative enablement. It was just cancelled. The government in its wisdom said: "That is it for the At and East. It is gone". Since that happened, the grain elevator in Saint John, New Brunswick has closed and the grain elevator in Halifax is working at a quarter its capacity.

Has there been a bill to enable this cancellation? No, indeed, or at least not passed. Bill C-26 was introduced in the very late fall of 1989 and immediately received strong opposition from this side of the House. I want to pay tribute to my colleague, the hon. member for Lambton—Middlesex, who certainly increased my knowledge in the area of grain subsidies and the history of the At and East subsidy and its role in bringing Ontario grains to the Atlantic ports. Without the assistance of the hon. member for Lambton—Middlesex, I