

other bulk commodities without any subsidies of any kind, one of two things will happen in our country.

It either loses the markets or producers of those bulk commodities will have to take drastically lower prices and they will get out of that production. I do not care whether it is coal, potash, sulphur, pulp, or grain; you name it. All these programs, as does the WGTA to a certain extent, take into account our climate, our geography and who it is we are competing with, compared to climate, geography and where they produce their commodities.

As I pointed out earlier, the Australians and Argentinians produce their grain within 200 miles of salt water. The Argentine Government hauls its grain to export positions at no cost to the producers. Yet these two hon. members, one Liberal and one Tory, expect our grain producers and our shipping companies on the Great Lakes and seaway, to compete with that. That is unmitigated nonsense.

My colleague's motion makes imminent sense. It is another step we have to take. According to free trade agreement proponents, if they mean what they say about a level playing field and they are honest about it, we are to see to it that this sort of thing happens.

The St. Lawrence Seaway for Canadian products and shipping should be toll-free. It is a public investment. It is a public utility. It is there for all to use like our highways. I do not understand the so-called free market system and free enterprise system. It has been nothing more than socialism for the rich and capitalism for the poor.

I do not understand why there is the resistance to make a national effort to take into account our geography and climate and set up facilities and transportation costs that allow us to deliver our product to export positions anywhere between Thunder Bay and Halifax at an equal transportation cost to those of our competitors, even if that means another \$200 million or \$300 million a year in subsidy. I do not call it a subsidy. I call it protecting our investment in our farms, shipping companies and what we have put into the seaway and ports, all of which lose money. You cannot even give them away to a municipality.

Private Member's Business

This motion is worthy of consideration and action by a government of any political stripe, if it treats all the producers and transporters anywhere in this country equally and decently.

• (1750)

Mr. Bob Hicks (Scarborough East): Mr. Speaker, may I allude to some comments first of all by the hon. member for Regina—Lumsden. He refers to the amateurs who have spoken. I am proud to be an amateur. I am proud to have the opportunity of addressing this particular bill as the member for Scarborough East, because I think it is incumbent upon all members of this House to try to comprehend in some way the problems of their colleagues from other parts of Canada.

I think it is necessary for us to consider and examine various provisions of the Western Grain Transportation Act, which is a very important piece of legislation for all western farmers. The act came into effect on January 1, 1984. Rail freight rates for shippers increased and the federal government was committed to making payments to the railways to reflect new cost based rail rates.

The act consists of eight parts plus two schedules. The main provisions of the act include new regulatory and advisory machinery aimed at implementing the act and improving the over-all grain transportation system, and also a timetable for review of the acts, operation.

Although the act contains no formal statement of its over-all objectives there are references throughout to a number of interrelated objectives, such as to improve the capacity and efficiency of the grain transportation and handling system in order to maximize returns to producers and to ensure an adequate, reliable and efficient railway transportation system, as well as to ensure that the over-all revenues of the railway system are adequate to meet long-term needs.

The WGTA is comprised of five major parts which deal with administrative measures, rates, government payments, limits on shipper rates and reviews. The part dealing with administrative measures has two principle objectives. The first is to establish the Senior Grain Transportation Committee, to define its membership and responsibilities, to establish in law the grain transportation administrator and to define his responsibilities. It also deals with specific provisions related to efficiencies, system performance, service quantities, car allocation and railway commitment plan.

The Senior Grain Transportation Committee advises the minister and the administrator on any issue affecting the transportation, shipping and handling of grain,