

*Government Orders*

may be the best and least expensive insurance plan available to the eastern marketing system.

The government has decided that the at and east program should be eliminated. We on this side ask why the government is doing this? It is possible the government just did not have all the facts when it announced its intention to eliminate the program in the 1989 budget.

• (1620)

The members opposite did not truly understand the purpose of the program, the conditions which make its continued relevancy, and the benefits the program brings to many regions of the country and sectors of our economy. I trust they are listening to the arguments being made not only by myself and my colleagues but mostly by the Ontario wheat farmers, a number of whom from my own riding who are calling on this government to withdraw this bill.

There is little question that the government made a serious error of omission in identifying the original intention of the at and east program. In announcing its planned elimination, the government stated: "The intent of the program was to ensure that Canadian grain and flour shipments would continue to be exported through Canadian east coast ports, rather than competing U.S. ports". That is all the government said.

In fact, the intention of the government of the day in bringing in this program was twofold, not just for that reason. In addition to ensuring that eastern Canadian ports could compete with U.S. ports, the program intended to enable the ports of Halifax and Saint John to complete the ports of the St. Lawrence.

In 1966, the then transport minister said: "We feel there is an equal obligation in this field with regard to the Crowsnest. The purpose of this is to ensure that we will have rates which will provide some inducement and incentive to shippers to use the facilities of the Atlantic ports".

This omission is very important because it nullifies the government's contention that the program is no longer needed because the conditions which justify it no longer exist. One of the two reasons given by the government for its elimination is just plain wrong.

The second government justification for the program's elimination is equally misguided, but much more erro-

neous than the first. The budget papers read: "The subsidy has the effect of diverting traffic away from the Seaway in favour of subsidized rail movements and is inconsistent with the government's market-oriented policy". The government uses the term "market-oriented" as a banner, more like a shield to hide behind. These are the government's catch phrases, as though their mere invocation should be enough to stifle dissent, lest a government critic be labelled a socialist.

The fact of the matter is that this government has brought the term "market-oriented" and the term "free trade" along with it into the realms of obscurity. These terms now mean anything the government wants them to mean. Most often, that spells hardship for Canadian farmers.

The Canadian government has embarked on the path of unilateral disarmament. In the wake of the free trade agreement and in the midst of agricultural negotiations at GATT, as well as in the expectation of the subsidy negotiations with the United States, the members opposite and the government are stripping the country of programs that have served us so well. Prior to any negotiations with the free trade agreement, it was giving away the boat.

The at and east program obviously is one of these programs that should be protected, but that the government is giving up prior to negotiations on subsidies for the free trade deal. The program has resulted in benefits to Atlantic ports in the elevators of Saint John and Halifax. The at and east forms a vital part of the orderly and efficient marketing of its grain by providing control over its movement of exports.

It is a system that has benefited exporters of Canadian wheat by providing a year-round supply, while at the same time, benefiting producers by protecting them from forcing to sell their wheat at a fixed time, even if that time coincides with a temporary drop in the world price. The at and east has also enabled grain producers to more efficiently utilize the limited storage and elevator space in the Georgian Bay and Great Lakes regions. It has helped to alleviate the problems of bottle-neck and congestion within our transportation system. The at and east had facilitated the development of a storage and transportation system that served producers and consumers well at very little cost to the government in real terms.