

Government Orders

ping of unemployment insurance, the ending of VIA Rail facilities, or the dismantling of the Crow rate without anything viable to take its place, is determined to put doctrine before reality and to put blind faith in Friedmannite economics ahead of the welfare and the survival of this nation. There is too much at stake with all the discussion going on today, as I said, just a few blocks away.

It is about time we realized that there is more to this country than a dollar and cent sign. We believe we can build and maintain a country that is worthwhile living in, that has room for some compassion, and that believes not only in equality but that there ought to be more equal treatment of all Canadians and the several regions that make up this country.

We will support this amendment by the Liberal Party, even though it offers nothing new. We will be proposing our own amendment today, depending perhaps on how the debate goes, in order to try to bring some kind of modification and keep the basic system alive while adjusting to some current economic realities.

This is an important bill, probably much more important than the public recognizes. The issues central to this bill are the same issues that are central to the existence and the survival of Canada. That is why we will oppose the bill, that is why we will support any amendment that attempts to stop it, and that is why we will be proposing our own suggestions to keep this program alive, to keep these communities alive, to keep the regions alive, and to keep Canada alive.

Mr. Ron MacDonald (Dartmouth): Mr. Speaker, I rise again to participate in the debate, this time at report stage of Bill C-26, the at and east legislation.

When I spoke the last time I clearly articulated, after much research and listening to a lot of people in my region, the economic impact of the loss of the at and east on the ports of Halifax and Saint John. In addition, a tremendous economic dislocation will take place in the agricultural industry and related shipping industries in the port of Halifax and the port of Saint John.

I was here today to listen to the remarks of my colleague, the hon. member for Annapolis Valley—Hants. It would do well for all members of this place to sit down and listen to a member of his stature when he

speaks on such issues and when he appeals to the House for some cross the centre aisle exchange when bills are bad bills and affect people across this country negatively.

I was exceptionally happy to see him holding firm to the position he espoused in the House the last time he spoke on this bill. Unfortunately he was not here for the vote that day. I hope he will be here for the vote today, because what he said is that this government has missed the mark when it comes to dealing with the at and east bill. More important, I believe he said that he would be supporting the amendments we are currently debating because they are good amendments.

Since the government introduced the regulations which would have done away with the at and east subsidy in Atlantic Canada in June 1989, the government has been so hell-bent on going through with its proposals, no matter how badly flawed they are and no matter where and how poignant the responses are in the communities affected, that it just steamrolls whenever it can.

When I participated in debate the last time, my hon. colleague from Halifax West took exception to the fact that I thought his comments expressed the certainty this bill would pass anyway so let us just deal with the consequences. I did not hold that view then and I certainly do not hold it now. This is not a *fait accompli*. This is a parliamentary democracy and in a parliamentary democracy the government introduces legislation.

After full and thorough debate the bill goes into committee and the committee reports. Hopefully, if the bill is flawed, it will be amended to make it better legislation. The hon. member for Halifax West does not particularly like the fact that government legislation might be flawed and that even members on his own side of the House can agree with the amendments that have been put forward by my colleague. The hon. member for Annapolis Valley—Hants who happens to be the chairman of the Standing Committee on Transport agrees.

The effect of this amendment is basically to rescue the government. In 1985 the Atlantic Provinces Transportation Commission sent some unsolicited proposals to the government because it heard rumours that the at and east legislation was going to be gutted and that the subsidy would be done away with. Being responsible and trying to ensure that its industry was not terribly dislo-