

Government Orders

Has the hon. member talked to the Atlantic Provinces Transportation Commission? Does he endorse their suggestion for off-sets to the elimination of the at and east rate? Perhaps we can move positively in this direction once this bill is passed. If we simply object to the passage of the bill then we are in suspense. We do not know what is going to happen. I would ask the hon. member to put his mind to the future so that we can resolve some of the problems, rather than continue to pour money into the Canadian National Railway.

Why do members opposite want to continue to pour money into the Canadian National Railway company when they have the opportunity to help the farmers, to help the grain elevator operators and a host of other people?

Mr. LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso): Mr. Speaker, first of all, for the hon. member's edification, I spoke with the Atlantic Provinces Transportation Commission this morning on this bill.

It is certainly not my understanding that they are supporting the elimination of the at and east program prior to their even being consulted about their proposal. They were complaining that they had made useful suggestions to the government, and they never even got an answer. They did not even get the courtesy of a substantive reply from the Minister of Agriculture and the Deputy Prime Minister.

The member suggests that we take a more positive attitude and that we go forward because this has been eliminated and we should accept it. I beg to differ. This bill is before the House of Commons. For the government to have the arrogance to eliminate a statutory subsidy before it is introduced in Parliament is a complete contempt of Parliament. There is just no way that we on this side of the House are going to abide by the kind of action that rides roughshod over the rights of all the members in this House.

If we were to apply that logic, perhaps we should concede to the passage of the goods and services tax, which 80 per cent of Canadians oppose vigorously and which we have opposed and will continue to oppose vigorously.

Mr. Guy H. Arseneault (Restigouche—Chaleur): Mr. Speaker, I just want to congratulate my colleague from Cape Breton—Highlands—Canso for an excellent speech.

Does he see in Bill C-26 an intent by the government to set up certain targets in its deficit reduction, particularly Atlantic Canadians? There seems to be a target set on the elderly, the unemployed, students, veterans, those who require child care, farmers and indeed, fishing people. Does he agree that these are the people who should be hit the hardest? Are these people able to manage some of those reduction measures?

• (1340)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The hon. member for Restigouche has asked quite a few questions, and you have a minute to try to rebut, or answer.

Mr. LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso): Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. Essentially, this bill targets the agricultural community in Atlantic Canada, which is going to be facing higher costs as a consequence of this measure and will have to pass those costs on or will be in even more difficulty *vis-à-vis* other parts of the country, than it already is. That is one community which is threatened. It also says that when it comes to moving grain for export or being involved in this activity, Atlantic Canadians do not have a role to play. It is pitting one part of the country against the other and, as is so often the case, it is Atlantic Canada that is coming up the loser.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions and comments are now terminated. The hon. member for Regina—Lumsden. Before he begins his speech, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate him on his sixty-fifth birthday and, of course, his 23 years in Parliament.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina—Lumsden): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and—do not start counting my time yet. I appreciate your remarks, Mr. Speaker, and the reaction of my colleagues. I know I do not look it, act it, or feel it, but I am. The only problem is that I have spent all my working life earning that old age pension which starts tomorrow, and the Minister of Finance is going to claw it back. However, that is another fight.

For over a century Canada has had a system of transportation assistance programs that took into account our geography, our distances, our climate and where our people who produced agricultural products were located. Hence, we had the statutory grain rates in western Canada, we had the bridge rates in northern Ontario, the Maritime Freight Assistance Act, Atlantic