

Government Orders

acquire our consent to a retroactive and short-sighted elimination of a Canadian program.

• (1330)

Ms. Mary Clancy (Halifax): Mr. Speaker, I rise first of all to thank my colleague, the hon. member for Cape Breton Highlands—Canso, for his eloquent support of my motion in this particularly crucial matter to our region, the Atlantic region and in particular to my city of Halifax. As my hon. friend has mentioned, we have already seen the end of the grain elevator in Saint John, New Brunswick and we are witnessing the slow strangulation of the grain elevator operation in Halifax. This is an operation, I might add, that has a long tradition in our harbour city. With the concomitant loss of jobs, as my colleague has stated, this is yet another terrible blow to an already limping economy in Atlantic Canada.

I would like the member for Cape Breton Highlands—Canso to elaborate on his remarks about Canada in the post free trade era. A number of us in Atlantic Canada were less than enthusiastic about the free trade deal. I think perhaps that is why there are a number of us here on this side of the House. Where does he believe the cancellation of the at and east to fit into the scenario of a post free trade Canada.

Mr. LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, the member for Halifax, for her remarks and also for her question.

There is no question that the cancellation of at and east has to be understood in terms of the broad economic policy agenda of this government, if you can call it an agenda. What it is doing is putting the Atlantic economy even more at the mercy of the strong pull which has always existed toward the United States. One of the ironies of this particular bill is that the Atlantic Provinces Transportation Commission, in order to defend the interests of the livestock producers in Atlantic Canada in the face of the reduction in competition and the increase in costs which they will suffer as a result of this bill, have had to appeal to the government to withdraw a countervail on the importation of U.S. corn into Atlantic Canada.

They are countervailing us on everything that moves, including our pork exports and other exports for which they are harassing us at the border. Many of our agricultural products, including potatoes from Prince Edward Island, western beef, and pork are being affected. They have made it impossible for Atlantic farmers to survive and have a cost framework which allows them to compete. We have imposed countervail duties on the Americans which only hurt the farmers from another part of the country, and we have had to go begging to let the U.S. corn in. It is a telling example of how the Atlantic economy is being progressively shut off and isolated by this government. There is no question that this is part of the post free trade agenda.

Mr. Howard Crosby (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I must say to my colleague from Cape Breton Highlands—Canso that I am a little disappointed that he would take such a regressive attitude toward a measure which was recommended by the Atlantic Provinces Transportation Commission some time ago for consideration by the government. Obviously it is a subsidy that is obsolete, based on a situation that existed some time ago. There is an obvious need for reform. I am sorry that he joins the member from Halifax who perhaps does not have sufficient background in some of these things to know some of the pertinent facts to realize that whatever else, the at and east is not accomplishing the goal which it was set out to accomplish.

Just to make sure that the member from Halifax especially knows what the at and east is all about, it was designed to allow east coast ports to compete with United States ports. They now can compete very favourably. The problem is with the competition from the St. Lawrence ports, from other Canadian ports. It is a matter entirely within Canada.

I am somewhat disappointed that the member does not recognize the facts of the situation, that the at and east is gone. It has been effectively terminated. There are no shipments now being made. Why would anybody stand in the House of Commons and move a six-month hoist? The at and east is already history. What members have to do is work positively toward some off-sets to accomplish the ends that need to be accomplished.