

Restraint of Government Expenditures

our crops are raised and where our flour is milled. It must take that into account when we attempt to make sales in Europe, in central and southern America and in the Soviet Union. The only way we can do that is through a system of transportation rates that allows us to compete with other countries which are already subsidizing their flour milling industry to a great extent.

● (1520)

Mr. John Wise (Elgin): Mr. Speaker, although you know that quite frequently we in this party vary considerably in respect of party philosophy with our good friends sitting to our left, before I begin my remarks may I make the comment that what has been said by the hon. member for Regina-Lake Centre (Mr. Benjamin) in criticism of the government has been quite right. His comments with reference to this legislation, particularly in respect of Clause 15, the repeal of Section 272 of the Railway Act, are quite right as well. However, I wish to caution the hon. member that what he said concerning my colleague from Moose Jaw and the rest of my colleagues is quite wrong.

We on this side of the House, and indeed the Canadian public, have called upon the government time and time again to demonstrate by deed and action some restraint in government spending. The record clearly shows that this government talks about restraint, preaches restraint and expects the segments of our society to practise restraint, while in reality it continues to spend more and more itself. In other words, I am sure there would be unanimous agreement that this government does not practise what it preaches. The government tells people in all regions of the country to do as it says but not as it does.

In general this bill is a pretty good example of government window-dressing designed to make clear that it is spending less money when exactly the opposite is the case. The over-all effect of Bill C-19 will be of little or no significance. It brings into law certain measures already in practice and indicates other measures that are to be taken. Given the record of this government in the general area of belt tightening, one would be tempted to say it is losing the battle of the bulge. Is it any wonder people become skeptical about a government bill termed "the government expenditures restraint act"? The President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras) has indicated a reduction of \$1.5 billion of expenditures would result from the passage of this bill. Given the past record of this government one is encouraged to say, as a result of these measures at least, that this simply will not happen. Upon review of this bill and in light of other planned programs, it is obvious that what will really take place is a reshuffling of dollars and a deferral of payments. Only time will reveal the exact savings if any, and I detect a distinct absence of optimism in the minds of many Canadians.

Usually it is difficult in respect of bills this type which cover a wide range of subjects to arrive at a position, be it for or against. This bill, however, contains one clause that resolves our difficulties in this regard. In fact, because of this particu-

[Mr. Benjamin.]

lar clause and its rather surprising presence in this bill one is left with no choice but to oppose the entire piece of legislation. I must admit that I am genuinely surprised the government has not seen fit to eliminate Clause 15 which calls for the repeal of Section 272 of the Railway Act commonly referred to as the "at and east" rates.

On many previous occasions I have spoken in this House about the lack of concern this government has shown in respect of the agricultural industry. I have spoken about the lack of effective programs, the lack of government action to resolve pressing problems in the agricultural industry and the low priority given by this government to industry generally. Clause 15 is simply another glaring example of this government's attitude toward Canada's farm community. On the same subject one now continually hears the comment across this country that the influence of the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) within cabinet has eroded to the point of insignificance. That has been obvious to us on this side of the House for months. The fact that the people in the industry now recognize this to be the case simply proves that although you can fool some of the people some of the time, there is no way that you can fool all of the people all of the time, especially when the people happen to be those involved in our agricultural industry.

I was glad to read in the speech of my colleague from Halifax-East Hants that he had reviewed the minister's performance before the standing committee on May 4, 1976. Certain aspects of the minister's statements concerning the removal of the "at and east" rates are very interesting and revealing. During that meeting both the chairman and the vice-chairman of the Canadian Livestock Feed Board, Dr. Perrault and Mr. Sonneveld, made it abundantly clear that if the clause was not withdrawn some very major problems would result.

Such action would compound the already hazardous situation with respect to available storage of feed grains for emergency purposes in the St. Lawrence region, particularly at the Montreal and Quebec City ports. I am certain that Quebec livestock feeders will not take kindly to any such measures and rightly so. It was made clear by the chairman that such a move would prove detrimental to the ports in the Georgian Bay area as well. The Minister of Agriculture also made interesting comments on that very subject. He stated in response to a question from my colleague from Red Deer that he was not in agreement with the measure and went on to indicate that he thought it was "absolutely nuts". I asked the minister if he would be supporting our motion requesting that this clause be withdrawn. The minister did not reply to that question directly but commented to the effect that I must have had a private detective watching his mail because I knew exactly what he was doing. This was May 4, 1976, six months ago, and was in relation to Bill C-87 which provided for the repeal of Section 272. Six months later Bill C-19 was introduced and Clause 15 reappeared.

The result of the representations of the Minister of Agriculture can now be determined as having been absolutely nil. He