

Government Orders

● (1250)

We realized that in the railway sector—and this comment does not apply only to Quebec—, there are two different criteria to determine the profitability of rail lines in Canada: everything east of Winnipeg had to be profitable in order to survive and continue operating, while everything west of Winnipeg was considered to be a subsidized service. This in turn led to some very strange things. They even discovered that some trainloads of grain were shipped to Vancouver via the port in Thunder Bay just to qualify for the subsidy.

I remember when we were kids and we used to play Monopoly. After going around the board, we would pass “Go” and claim \$200 before continuing to circle around. This truly reminds me of a game of Monopoly.

By eliminating this subsidy, the government will put an end to this game of Monopoly. We would like to be supportive and say that this is a good measure, but there is always an unfortunate aspect. In this case, it is the fact that the budget provides compensation—and I hope that farmers of Île d’Orléans and the Beupré shore will not choke when they hear this—to the tune of \$2.9 billion to western agricultural producers.

Mr. Loubier: Untaxed.

Mr. Guimond: Untaxed, the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot just pointed out.

We have to ask ourselves whether it is normal or acceptable, in 1995, for a democratic society to implement such provisions. This is why westerners have not been too vocal. They do not complain too much about the fact that the Western Grain Transportation Act will be repealed, because they know that they will get \$2.9 billion in compensation.

I say to Quebec agricultural producers: “Put on a smile, the federal taxes you pay will help your competition”. These subsidies will help western producers to change their production, and who is to say that they will not replace their grain production with meat, poultry or dairy products. And they will do it all with your federal taxes. This is incredible.

The bill also repeals the Atlantic Region Freight Assistance Act. Subsidies totalling some \$99 million, and perhaps as much as \$108 million, depending which of the two figures I have is accurate, are provided for the region located east of an imaginary line called the Jackman line, in the Beauce region, including the Gaspé peninsula and all of Atlantic Canada. Again, we are talking about subsidies totalling some \$100 million.

This program will be eliminated. As a transitory measure, the budget provides for a five year, \$326 million transportation adjustment program. Bloc Quebecois members representing eastern Quebec will probably express their views on this issue, since their region will be eligible for the moneys which will be

made available to either improve the highway system or support programs for secondary or tertiary processing.

In any case, I represent the riding of Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans and I am not directly concerned by this issue. However, I think that the residents of eastern Quebec, the lower St. Lawrence region, the Gaspé peninsula and the riding of Bellechasse are in a good position to know how this adjustment fund could be used.

I did meet business owners from that region who told me that, sometimes, this subsidy was ineffective—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but the period for debate is over. We now move on to questions and comments.

Since there are no questions, we resume debate. The hon. member for Egmont.

[English]

Mr. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Algoma. I am happy to have the opportunity to speak in support of Bill C-76, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 27.

● (1255)

I speak in support of the bill. I commend the Minister of Finance for the excellent job he has done in developing a budget that has been embraced by an overwhelming majority of Canadian people and international money markets.

On the one hand there have been complaints, as we heard from the Bloc Quebecois, that the minister went too far. On the other hand the consensus of the Reform Party is that we did not go far enough. However, the general consensus of Canadians is that the budget was a reasonable and fair effort to address the problems faced by the nation.

The people of Canada indicated very loudly and clearly that they wanted the minister to move decisively to address the problems of the debt and the deficit. They wanted to see a definitive plan by which the country could be moving toward a balanced budget and beyond to a surplus budget. Canadians also indicated that they did not want any increases in personal income tax, and there was none.

I am happy to say that the fundamental thrust of the budget addresses in a fair, equitable and balanced fashion the demands of the Canadian people. The budget responds to the need to put Canada’s fiscal house in order. Granted, there will be some pain but I believe that the burden of deficit reduction has been distributed fairly. The confidence of the Canadian people is being restored as they realize spending is tightening up and that they will be getting better value for their tax dollar.