

Government wants to play politics with Atlantic Canada. That is the pure and simple reason for not dealing with it, and I think that is a travesty.

● (1200)

I would say to members of the governing Party that if the people in Cape Breton, certainly all Atlantic Canadians, do not know what the Government is doing, they are certainly going to know. I think the people of Atlantic Canada are going to see through this sham.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support this motion by the Minister of State and Deputy House Leader (Mr. Lewis), because I believe we have in this particular case a very special motion. It is perhaps rare that this House must assert its privileges against the Senate. I have been in this House since last August as a new Member of Parliament and I must say it came as a bit of a shock to see some of the traditions in this House. For example, the Black Rod knocks on the door of this Chamber, interrupts proceedings and Members of the House of Commons dutifully go to the Senate to hear some message or pronouncement from the Senate. I was told, of course, that this is a tradition, a mere formality of subservience of the House of Commons to the Senate, and it was a bit of a shock to me to have to participate in asserting our privileges in this House against the Senate.

What the Senate has done with this particular piece of legislation is a disservice to the House of Commons. It has divided a Bill this House passed, albeit with substantial disagreement on particular parts of it from this side of the House, particularly from the New Democratic Party. But we supported the over-all legislation. In dividing this Bill, the Senate, as the Speaker has ruled, has interfered with the privileges of the House of Commons.

We, therefore, must join in with the motion in stating as follows; that we send a message to the Senate stating that this House disagrees with the text of the message made by the Senate to Bill C-103 because the House believes that in dividing the Bill, the Senate has altered the ends, purposes, considerations, conditions, limitations and qualifications of the grants of aid and supplies set out in the Bill, and has therefore infringed the privileges of this House, and we ask that the Senate return Bill C-103 in an undivided form. This motion is a very serious one. This House must claim its privileges against the Senate.

I must make a few comments on the Government's attitude toward the Senate in this respect. We have heard the Deputy House Leader rail against the unelected Senate as it carries out its activities in opposition to the House of Commons. The New Democratic Party has opposed the choice of a Senator as a Minister responsible for this Bill. The Government has chosen not to have a Minister in this House be the main spokesperson to report to Cabinet on this legislation. Instead, the Government itself chose a Senator to head the agency and

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to be the Minister responsible, and we must have someone in this House to answer questions and speak for this agency.

The Government rails against the Senate for interfering with this Bill, but the Government itself has made use of the Senate and instead of having one of its many Members of Parliament in this House act as a Minister responsible for ACOA, it has chosen a Senator. So the Government, I would suggest, is rather hypercritical on this point. It rails against the Senate yet it chooses a Senator. In addition, the hypocrisy of the Government on this issue is evident by refusing, despite many invitations from this side of the House, to bring in legislation to curb the power of the Senate with respect to what it can do to Bills originating from this House.

We listened to what the Government had to say about the Senate but we do not believe it is sincere in wishing to do something about it. It continually rails against the Senate yet does not take any action despite repeated invitations by this Party to do so.

I should also point out that the very issue on which the Senate has taken action in dividing this Bill is one that was brought up by my Party at the first opportunity in the legislative committee studying Bill C-103. That committee, as you know, Mr. Speaker, travelled to Atlantic Canada, to St. John's, Halifax, Cape Breton, Port Hawkesbury, Prince Edward Island and Fredericton. We heard submissions on this issue.

This issue first came up in Port Hawkesbury where the committee held hearings. Members of the Liberal caucus and Liberal Senators are now taking up the cause of DEVCO, particularly, the Industrial Development Division, but when the committee held hearings in Cape Breton, there was not a Member of Parliament representing that Party even present, nor was there a Member present in Prince Edward Island or in Halifax to discuss the issues of ACOA and to listen to what those parts of Atlantic Canada had to say. It was my Party, and myself on that committee, who first moved amendments to the legislation to delete the entire section of the Bill dealing with the breakdown of DEVCO, hiving off the Industrial Development Division. We listened to the arguments put forth and the comments made by the people of Cape Breton as to what they felt was wrong with breaking up DEVCO and breaking away the Industrial Development Division. I will not go into all the arguments except to say that with DEVCO having both a Coal Mining Division and an Industrial Development Division working together, the DEVCO operation, with certain flaws, of course, has become a model of enterprise. With that operation there has been the ability of the Industrial Development Division to maintain flexibility in dealing with economic circumstances and changes within Cape Breton. It was an agency within Cape Breton that had control, not from Moncton or Ottawa, but from Cape Breton itself.

Within the Industrial Development Division, working with the Coal Mining Division, there was also the capacity of the advice, knowledge and expertise of those involved in the coal