

*Government Organization Act, Atlantic Canada, 1987*

● (1530)

The report further recommends that there should become a one stop shop to the degree possible by encompassing the Industrial Development Division of DEVCO and DRIE. That is exactly what is done in Bill C-103. As a result, we heard from the people of Cape Breton. After that, of course, we came back once again to report stage in this House in March. At that time, four hours and 50 minutes was assigned to debate. Twelve Members of Parliament had an opportunity to speak. Third reading took four hours and 10 minutes, and another nine Members of Parliament had an opportunity to present their points of view. I was shocked when, on May 10, we had the vote on Bill C-103 and as I sat here as an Atlantic Canadian, I watched my colleagues, and I use the term loosely, from the Liberal Party, vote in favour of the Western Diversification Office and against the creation of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. I could not believe that those Members felt differently about the economic development opportunities for western Canada and those for eastern Canada.

The Liberals took a stand in favour of new economic programs for western Canada and a stand against the creation of the very same for eastern Canada. That caused me concern. I think it caused everyone in this House concern because we realized that over the last 20 years, the Liberal regional development policies were concocted in Ottawa and bore no relationship whatsoever to the real needs of Atlantic Canadians. In Bill C-103, the Government gave Atlantic Canadians the opportunity to be involved in the economic decisions facing Atlantic Canada, but the Liberal Party decided it did not want to transfer the power from Ottawa to Atlantic Canada. When we scraped the surface, we found it did not want to transfer the power from the old-line leadership of the Liberal Party to people in Atlantic Canada who were capable of making decisions that would benefit the economy of Atlantic Canada.

The Liberals still want to hold hostage the economic opportunities of Atlantic Canada with a view that "Ottawa knows best". We had 20 years of that kind of rule in this country. We in Atlantic Canada were constantly told that Ottawa knew best. We have heard members of the opposite Party speaking today about the high unemployment rate in the past. They spoke about the lack of economic opportunities in Atlantic Canada. But those were the result of holding in Ottawa all the decision-making ability and power that affected Atlantic Canada.

Now, of course, here in Ottawa, the Liberal Senators, propped up by the Liberal Members opposite, are continuing to foster that point of view. The Liberals continue to be reluctant to let Atlantic Canadians make decisions for the benefit of Atlantic Canadians. Those Members say that what the Senate has done has not affected the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and its ability to function. That is not the case. There are provisions in Bill C-103 that ACOA can use to the benefit of Atlantic Canada which are not available under the existing mandate assigned by the Cabinet and

previously given to DRIE. If the Bill is split, Cape Breton would not have the benefits of a Crown corporation directly connected with the federal regional economic development agency that has the primary responsibility and resources for economic development in Atlantic Canada. In order to improve service to Cape Bretoners, the two federal economic development organizations should report to the same Minister and should have the same president. That would not be possible if this legislation is not adopted.

The reorganization that is provided in Bill C-103 will help both organizations be more co-ordinated in order to reduce duplication and confusion. If the ACOA Bill is not passed, Atlantic Canadians will be denied access to some very important economic development opportunities. Specifically, the Minister responsible for ACOA will not have the power to co-finance the projects of other Ministers that will improve the economic base of Atlantic Canada. The Minister will not have the power to designate areas of preferred treatment. ACOA will not have the power to take stock options in certain circumstances. Those are all provisions that are included in Bill C-103 as it is currently drafted.

We would not have those tools to put to work for the economy of Atlantic Canada if the Senate gets its way and this Bill is split. I think all Atlantic Canadians are concerned. The Atlantic Canada Chamber of Commerce has expressed its concern with respect to the tactics we are seeing displayed in this House in defence of the actions of the other place. I do not believe the Liberal Party is explaining to Atlantic Canadians exactly what it is trying to do, because I do not think it can explain what it is trying to do. I do not think it knows what it is trying to do.

There is one gentleman located in the other place who does not believe that anyone would have a new idea with respect to attacking the problems facing Atlantic Canada since DEVCO was created in the 1970s. But people do have new ideas and new solutions to old problems. We have had 20 years of the same kind of policy. We have had 20 years of that Party and that Government. We have had 20 years of those decisions being made here in Ottawa, and at the same time in Atlantic Canada we have had 20 years of high unemployment and limited economic opportunities.

What is the Liberal Party showing Atlantic Canadians? Is it showing that it wants to change the way the Government of Canada assists in regional development in Atlantic Canada? No, it is not showing that. Is it showing it is prepared to resist the status quo nature of the other place? No, it is not showing that either.

Is it showing that it is prepared to pave the way for new ideas for economic development in Atlantic Canada? No, it is not showing that. Is it prepared to show Atlantic Canadians that it is willing to accept new solutions to old problems? No, it is not. It is prepared to show what it has shown all along, contempt for Atlantic Canadians, and lack of faith in the