

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION ACT, ATLANTIC CANADA, 1987

MEASURE TO ENACT—NON-CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Lewis:

That a Message be sent to the Senate to acquaint Their Honours that this House disagrees with the text of the Message made by the Senate to Bill C-103, an Act to increase opportunity for economic development in Atlantic Canada, to establish the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation and to make consequential and related amendments to other Acts, because this 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, contrary to Standing Order 87, as recommended by Her Excellency the Governor General to this House, and has therefore infringed the privileges of this House, and asks that the Senate return Bill C-103 in an undivided form.

Mr. Dennis H. Cochrane (Moncton): Mr. Speaker, today we are debating a motion that should not be debated. Indeed, we are having a debate in the House that should not be taking place at all.

The Senate of Canada should not have divided Bill C-103 because it has neither the right nor the privilege to do so. As the Speaker stated in his ruling on July 11, the Senate has in fact "infringed the privileges of this place", not just the House of Commons as an institution but the privileges of each and every Member of Parliament.

While we take up the valuable time of the House today to debate a motion disagreeing with the action of the Senate, all of Atlantic Canada suffers. That includes Cape Breton Island, whose fate the Senate now holds in the palm of its usurping hand.

One is truly amazed to sit in the House and listen to Liberal Members of Parliament defend the actions of their friends in the other place. Their strong words of support provide aid and comfort to the architects of the old discredited policies and programs of regional development in Atlantic Canada, those whose approach to regional development is embedded not in the belief of the individual entrepreneurs of Atlantic Canada and their ability to create new jobs but in the almighty transfer payment.

It was not the Senate that proposed to Atlantic Canadians the creation of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. It did not, because it remains the last bastion of the old Liberal philosophy of economic development based upon hand-outs. It could not because it would have had to create a money Bill, a Bill which is clearly beyond its prerogative.

Why is the Liberal majority in the Senate now attempting a constitutional end-run on the House of Commons when it has neither the moral nor the constitutional authority to do so? We can only put the answer down to simple partisan politics. Now,

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in a thinly disguised veneer of caucus unity holding together the Liberal ranks, Liberal Members of Parliament support, in the name of fraternity for all, the action of Liberal Senators.

Bill C-103 was thoroughly debated at all stages by Members of Parliament. The first reading took place on December 18, 1987. Second reading took place in January, and that process took 11 hours, 4 minutes of House time. There were 26 Members who had a chance to speak on second reading, including six Members from the Liberal Party.

At the committee stage, the legislative committee travelled throughout Atlantic Canada because the Government felt it was essential that Atlantic Canadians had input on a Bill that was extremely crucial to Atlantic Canada and the welfare of Atlantic Canadians. That was the first time a legislative committee travelled. There were 34 hours and 20 minutes of hearings in which 73 witnesses had an opportunity to appear before the committee.

When that committee was in Halifax, in Port Hawkesbury and in Charlottetown, two Parties were represented: The Government Party and the New Democratic Party. Where was the concern of the Liberal Members of Parliament then? Where were they in Port Hawkesbury when we had a chance to be on site in Cape Breton to hear the concerns of the people from Cape Breton with regard to Bill C-103 and particularly with regard to the Bill to create the Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation?

It was not, as we have heard since then, a major thrust against the division of Devco. If I remember correctly, there were two major concerns expressed at that time. One concerned the geographic area set aside for Enterprise Cape Breton and the fact that it did not match exactly with the area assigned for the tax credit purposes. The second concern was expressed by the very chairperson of DEVCO, and dealt with the division of the assets and whether the assets were divided appropriately. They did not debate the principles as much as they debated the logistics of how this Bill would be implemented.

Not only did we hear from the people of Cape Breton at that time, but in September, 1985, the Government had an opportunity to hear from the Cape Breton Advisory Committee chaired by Dr. Theresa MacNeil, the lady everyone else now quotes as being against what Bill C-103 does to DEVCO. In that report, the Cape Breton Advisory Committee suggested that several things happened. It identified barriers to development caused by the confusion of a multiplicity of development agencies. It felt that it was a barrier to economic development in Cape Breton. It recommended a new development agency, independent in matters of policy, management and operation from the coal side of the corporation, which is exactly what Bill C-103 does. We split DEVCO, and the Industrial Development Division goes to Enterprise Cape Breton and DEVCO retains its mandate with respect to the Coal Mining Division.