

*Western Economic Diversification Act***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

WESTERN ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION ACT

MEASURE TO ENACT

The House resumed from Monday, May 2, consideration of the motion of Mr. Mulroney that Bill C-113, an Act to promote the development and diversification of the economy of western Canada, to establish the Department of Western Economic Diversification and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the third time and passed, and the motion of Mr. Hawkes:

That this question be now put.

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to contribute to the debate on third reading of Bill C-113. As you know, we rather reluctantly have decided to support the Bill because, of course, the NDP is concerned about the goal of diversification of the economy of western Canada. We sympathize with and support the aim of westerners to ensure that their economy can and will be broadened from its traditional reliance on farming, energy and other resources. However, we are nonetheless unhappy with and have substantial misgivings about the structure being put in place by the Government.

May I say as well that I have some pretty grave misgivings about the fact that a Government which came to power some three and a half years ago is only now getting around to establishing this new vehicle for regional development in western Canada. While I recognize that the Western Diversification Office has been in operation over the course of the last year or so, nonetheless the failure to give legislative support to the initiative indicates a lack of urgency. Or, perhaps it is just an inability on the part of the Progressive Conservatives, despite their numbers, to effectively set priorities and manage the business of this House so that this legislative program gets through.

I have some real problems with that because I have been thinking a bit and my Party has hopes of forming a Government—

Mr. Holtmann: Where?

Mr. Cassidy: —after the next election.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Cassidy: That is a very real possibility now. One of the things I believe we have to do is set out a program and put it before Parliament and then set to working with Parliament on an urgent basis to get that program adopted. What we are seeing now is a failure by the Government in determining urgency, setting priorities, determining objectives, and then carrying through. That is one of the reasons why so many

Canadians, including those in western Canada, are disillusioned with the Government and are increasingly questioning whether it should be allowed another term in office.

Mr. Mantha: Get to the subject matter.

Mr. Cassidy: Mr. Speaker, this Bill sets up a kind of hybrid structure of responsibility in the Government for regional development. It sets up a new Department of Industry, Science and Technology which will be responsible for regional development in Ontario and Quebec. Then there will be a Minister responsible for the Atlantic provinces economic development initiative and another responsible for the Western Diversification Office. Therefore, we will have three separate Ministers, each of whom is responsible for promoting regional development in different parts of the country and acting as advocates within cabinet and in relations with other departments. There will not be one department or one branch of Government with over-all responsibility for seeking to ensure fairness between the regions of Canada and fairness for different Canadians in different parts of the country.

I know the situation of my friend from Kamloops—Shuswap where, even after four or five years of economic growth in Canada, the unemployment rate in that part of the interior of British Columbia stays somewhere close to 20 per cent. It just has not come down under the Progressive Conservatives and there is no indication that the Western Diversification Office will have much impact on bringing it down.

What I believe is a real concern or ought to be is the fact that the Ministry of Industry, Science and Technology will clearly be the senior ministry of these regional development outfits. In fact, there will not be a ministry in Ottawa directly concerning itself with western diversification. There will be an Assistant Deputy Minister and a liaison office here in Ottawa, but the base of the Western Diversification Office will be in Edmonton with branch offices in Vancouver, Saskatoon and Winnipeg.

In those circumstances I fear that the legitimate concerns of westerners and their desire to try to influence the policies of other Departments are going to prove to be somewhat less effective in implementation. In other words, they will not have the clout they hope to have and which the Government promised when it established legislation for the office. I fear the same thing may happen with respect to the Atlantic region as well.

Let me just read from a government hand-out on the responsibilities of the new Department of Industry, Science and Technology. It says that the creation of the new Department should be seen in the light of a series of initiatives the Government has taken, including creation of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, responsible for regional economic development programs in Atlantic Canada, and the Western Diversification Office serving four western provinces. This new approach to industrial revitalization can in no way be interpreted, says the Government, as a diminished emphasis on