



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

THE HON. JOE VOLPE, P.C., M.P.
SPEECH ON BILL C-3, AN ACT TO AMEND THE ARCTIC WATERS
POLLUTION PREVENTION ACT
SECOND READING
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2009

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in my questioning just a moment ago, and I now want to reiterate, on balance this does not look like legislation that we would have any difficulty in at least studying further at committee and perhaps supporting.

Why would I say that? I do not think there is a Canadian in the country who would not agree that we should extend our sovereignty over waters that we have traditionally considered to be our own. As the minister says, these are part of waters that we have thought to be our internal waters. They are part of the Arctic Archipelago and therefore they are Canadian territory.

As for the part that goes beyond that, and think about this for a moment, we are, with a stroke of the pen, reasserting what we have already agreed with all our partners in the United Nations, and that is this is our territory, it is our right to extend our jurisdiction to the full 200 kilometres. That is great. We want to do that. It is good for us. We expect that as part of Canadian sovereignty we would give notice to the entire world that these waters are now our waters.

Just so you know, Mr. Speaker, because I know you come from that province, this is equal to the entire land mass of Saskatchewan that we are, with this bill, advertising to the world is now territory water, aquatic territory, over which the Canadian government, the state of Canada, will now exercise its jurisdiction.

I know members have read the bill in great detail. It is about 10 lines long, yet it generated from the minister a speech of about 15 minutes. My compliments to him. I listened through it all, hoping to hear something more than “looking at”. I think the minister, perhaps to his credit but certainly to the advantage of his party, indicated that the government was looking at a whole stream of things that would be made possible with the passage of the legislation.

We would be delighted to help him along. In the process, however, we would want to ask a few questions. He talked about four pillars upon which the legislation would be based. I was looking, for example, at the mechanisms, the processes, the moneys, the resources that he and the

government would be putting in place in order to, first, effectively exercise the jurisdiction which we are claiming as is our right under the Conventions of the UN over this entire territory.

For example, how many more ships are we prepared to buy, to lease, to engage in protecting the territory that, as I said a moment ago, is the size of the province of Saskatchewan, which is bigger than almost every other country in the world, save maybe the top 10?

If we are not to have more ships in aquatic territory, how does the minister expect Canadians to feel assured that they will exercise greater sovereignty over this great expanse of further territory? It is not that Canadians do not want to, because we do. We have already established that we feel it is our right, it is part of our territory, and we do want to protect it. We want to exercise sovereignty over it.

We want to, as well, as the minister suggested, ensure that there is greater security. For that, aside from the satellite beams that we will be engaging to help us track where ships might be, because I think we are talking about ships in aquatic territory, we are not really talking about tanks, we are not talking about land rovers, we are not talking about boots on the ground, as he mentioned, we are also talking about ocean-going vessels, whether they are below surface or above surface. However, there is no indication that resources will be put at the disposal of the Canadian government and its enforcement agencies to ensure they can do the job that the bill would have them do. Otherwise it is meaningless.

To say that we are now extending our sovereignty over additional waters, the equivalent size of Saskatchewan, without being able to put resources to effect that sovereignty is empty rhetoric. It is a looking at rather than doing.

In my question for the minister, who is courteous enough to listen to debate in the House, I mentioned a second thing I was looking for, and perhaps he might want to address this.

We must remember that we are extending sovereignty over an aquatic territory. If this is going to be an economic development exercise in economic development, we are not only going to claim our sovereignty over this vast expanse of water, but we are going to take claim an authority over whatever is underneath the ocean bed.

The minister has suggested that an additional 33% of all the natural gas deposits in the northern part of the western hemisphere are resident in this area. I guess some of the science has speculated that is where it would be. The minister has made a similar observation about light crude and its availability for the energy requirements of tomorrow. I want to accept this.

That is all the more reason why I ask this. Where are the resources in the bill to ensure that Canadian businesses and Canadian residents in the three Arctic territories and beyond have the right of first development of those natural resources? Where is the plan? Can we look at, speculate and plan? Yes, we can do all of these three things, but where is the plan? Where is the how to that tells us that we would, through the bill, be engaging in the development of the future interests of Canadians not only in the north, but everywhere? I do not see that. I do not see the resources.

It is a bit disconcerting because here we are in the midst of a debate about the budget implementation bill. I know Bill C-3 is not a part of that, but we are still seized in the House with ensuring that the budget implementation bill and all of the tens of billions of dollars that this Parliament would authorize the government to expend for the purpose of stimulating the Canadian economy and for developing the future assets of Canada's potential resources are spent. There is not a penny, not a dollar, not an indication of a specific agenda item.

There is though, if I might digress, some value in rhetoric, but there is a lot of rhetoric. I am not sure rhetoric is going to buy the credibility that Canadians so desperately want when it comes to engaging in particular actions.

A third pillar the minister says is an environmental one. The environment that he has talked about up until this point has to do with ocean-going vessels polluting the waters they traverse. By that pollution, I am not sure if he is talking about greenhouse gas-type emissions. I suspect he is talking in greater detail about hard pollution that goes from the ship into the water and affects the marine life and anybody who is dependent on that marine life. The minister has talked about that at great length and he has talked about how we will protect that.

Canadians, or at least the ones who had the good fortune to exercise their vote for me, did not see from the government in the last Parliament any substantive action on pollution abatement, on pollution restriction, or on going after polluters in our backyard.

Will we now believe the Conservatives when they say that they will get those people who pollute waters, which are about the size of the entire province of Saskatchewan, but that they will not spend a dime to do it? They will stand in the House of Commons on Bill C-3 when everybody is watching them. Because they say that they will do that and because they say that the environment is one of the concerns they will try to address with Bill C-3, everybody will believe them and will back off. I find that difficult to believe.

One reason why I find it difficult to believe is that even the casual reader will know that over the course of the last summer and fall, various other countries have taken a special interest in the Arctic waters, waters which we claim as our own. In fact, we have always said they have been our own. However, they extend to countries like Norway, Russia, Denmark, Greenland and the United States. They all have competing claims, competing interests and overlapping concerns about the environment and about pollution. The environment and pollution appear to be the umbrella under which everybody operates when they want to talk about interests and development.

I have not seen anything anywhere in the bill that says that we have engaged any of those countries in any bilateral discussions about how we will enforce our sovereignty, especially with respect to environmental and pollution type issues in the Arctic and in these waters in particular. I do not see that anywhere and there has not been any indication that the government has actually engaged in those kinds of discussions. Not only that, there is no indication that the government has raised these in the United Nations forum.

I understand the Prime Minister is at the United Nations today. During question period, one of my colleagues asked the government side a question about an agenda. In response none of those items were on that agenda, but it was asked during question period, not during answer period.

Perhaps the minister would care to elaborate on specifically which items related to the bill and, more specific, to the environment and pollution will be raised by the Prime Minister with counterparts in the United Nations so we can get the compliance of the countries that have a more immediate interest in the geography in question under the legislation.

If we do not have a forum in which to raise these issues with a receptive series of countries, and it is important that they be receptive, then we go back to one of my very first items of concern, which is: where are the resources to ensure that we have the military capacity to protect the sovereignty that we claim with the bill?

Are we spending more money in defence? Are we buying more vessels? I heard only one for Coast Guard increased capacity. One Coast Guard vessel, or turning it to a land example for our purposes, would be about three 18 wheelers, maybe four. If we dropped four 18 wheelers, one after the other, in the middle of Saskatchewan, who would notice? Not very many. It would take a while for those four 18 wheelers, one right behind the other, to patrol a territory the size of Saskatchewan.

We do not even have an indication that is what we will do. In a time when we are asking jurisdictions to spend tens of billions of dollars, along comes legislation that says the government will take care of this. It will be its territory. It will take care of the environment, catch all polluters and develop the economy in the area.

We could probably build infrastructures for three months of the year, so it would take a substantial amount of time to do infrastructure that might, in other places, take three or four years. However, there is no indication of resources. How seriously can we take the government on this?

We hear the usual story about trying to help people locally. Yes, we want to help people locally and we want to give them greater authority over all of this but we need to remember that this is a bill about aquatic territory. The minister explained how this would do great things for people in the north, especially in those areas where they are resident about 1,000 kilometres from the shore. We, too, have great interest in ensuring that the economies and the sovereignty of people indigenous to the area are protected and enhanced.

However, we do not want to blow smoke in their eyes when we are talking about something else. We would like to have a bit of direct honesty about what it is we are going to do with them specifically that will enhance their sovereignty, give them greater autonomy and make them full partners in the development of that economic exercise that he says is one of the four pillars of this particular bill.

He says that Bill C-3 would give us control over those commercial shipping lanes, not that they are already available. They do not go through 12 months of the year. The depth of the ice is still such that it prevents that from happening. However, has the government given us an indication of how many ships use these shipping lanes? How will we monitor them?

For example, members may recall just recently the great activity by pirates just off the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. It is in the papers every day. The first thing that all countries, which have merchant marines operating in the area, tell us is that the ocean is so vast that it is

impossible for anybody to monitor or keep track of all these pirates. In Canada we would say polluters because that is what the minister focused his attention on.

Where are the resources to ensure that an aquatic territory that is vastly larger than the seas off Somalia and Saudi Arabia will be any safer for all of us? He said that we need to protect the security of Canadians from terrorists and from criminal organizations. Does he have an indication of which ones? Has he given us an indication of how much of that activity is currently going on and what means we need to engage in order to put an end to it?

I am shocked. If the minister could indicate to us that all of this is actually taking place, why have we not done anything so far? Is a piece of legislation that is some eight lines long, which gives us the authority to exercise jurisdiction that is already ours by UN convention, going to solve that problem? I would think not.

I would think that the minister would probably say that we need to do this, that we need to expend this amount of money, these hundreds of millions or billions of dollars, to ensure that Canadian sovereignty is firmly established, that security for all Canadians is protected in this area, and he would show us how. He would show us the vessels that we would engage, the satellites in which we would invest and the additional marines, RCMP or soldiers that we would engage in the area. He would show us the plan that is already in place to develop the economy with the hope that it will produce X number of jobs and X number of activities that will generate the economy in the area.

After all, the object of the day, in passing the action plan in this House, is to ensure that the tens of billions of dollars that Canadians are willing to invest go for the benefit of Canadians, not just today but down the road, and that they do it in an environment that gives them security and addresses the concerns for the environment and pollution, which are also very much on everyone's minds, and finally, that they provide the indigenous populations that are resident in the territories adjacent to this vast aquatic area with the future that we want them to take for granted.