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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, November 17, 2009

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, November 17, 2009

The House met at 10 a.m.

[*Translation*]

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*English*]

PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Privacy Commissioner concerning the Privacy Act for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2009.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), this report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

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FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONS AND REPORTS ANALYSIS CENTRE

The Speaker: I also have the honour to lay upon the table the audit report of the Privacy Commissioner concerning the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), this document is deemed to have been referred permanently to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

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CANADA-JORDAN FREE TRADE ACT

Hon. Gerry Ritz (for the Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-57, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the reports of the Canadian delegations of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group concerning its participation in the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region's 19th annual summit in Boise, Idaho, from July 12 to 16, 2009.

* * *

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 13th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

In accordance with the order of reference of Thursday, June 18, the committee has considered Bill C-36, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, and agreed on Monday, November 16, to report it with amendment.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on International Trade, entitled "Defending Supply Management at the WTO".

* * *

•(1010)

RADIOCOMMUNICATION ACT

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-482, An Act to amend the Radiocommunication Act (voluntary organizations that provide emergency services).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed my honour to bring to this House today, and for debate in the future, an act that will provide some financial assistance to thousands of volunteer organizations, across this country, that provide their services in emergencies.

Routine Proceedings

By emergency services that we talk about in this bill, we mean fire, ambulance, search and rescue, and other related services provided in an emergency situation. What this bill will mean for the voluntary organizations is that they will not be charged a fee to be issued a radio licence. Again I remind the House that this could save these volunteer organizations, that have so little to rely upon as it is, a lot of money.

I would like to personally thank Chief Vince MacKenzie of Grand Falls-Windsor Fire Department, who is also the president of the Association of Fire Services in Newfoundland and Labrador, for his assistance on this bill.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

PETITIONS

CHALK RIVER LABORATORIES

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by people from as far away as Waterloo as well as within the region of Deep River. They are calling upon Parliament to restore the Chalk River Laboratories facility to its former status as a national laboratory and, in so doing, to replace the NRU with a new reactor that will build on the successes of the 52-year-old NRU.

[Translation]

CANADA POST

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Madam Speaker, I wish to present to the House a petition calling on the government to continue the moratorium on rural post office closures. These signatures show that the people of Stanstead and Beebe, two municipalities in my riding, are concerned about the phasing out of public services in rural areas. They have every reason to be frustrated. They know that the survival of their towns is dependent on the availability of basic services, and a post office is part of that.

These 200 signatures are in addition to the ones already presented by my Bloc Québécois colleagues. The government must pay attention to these voices.

COLOMBIA

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present a list of more than one hundred names of people from the “republic of Madawaska”, from the communities of Saint-Basile, Saint-Joseph, Edmundston, and others in this beautiful region in northwestern New Brunswick. All of these names are in addition to the tens of thousands of Canadians who have already called on Parliament to reject the free trade agreement with Colombia, a country whose regime has blood on its hands.

A number of petitions have been presented here, and they all urge the government to reject this agreement and to conduct an independent assessment of its impact on the human rights of the Colombian people.

I am pleased to present these names today.

[English]

ANIMAL WELFARE

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by people from across Nova Scotia in support of a universal declaration on animal welfare. The petitioners state that the universal declaration would consider the prevention of cruelty to animals. They also note that people rely on animals for their livelihood. A universal declaration would also take animals into consideration during relief efforts and emergency planning.

[Translation]

CANADA POST

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present, on behalf of the citizens my riding, a petition containing 5,412 signatures demanding that postal services be maintained in rural areas. These signatures were collected primarily in the municipalities of Charlevoix and Côte-de-Beaupré.

This petition calls upon the federal government to maintain the moratorium on post office closures, given that these post offices play a key role in our economic and social lives by providing the infrastructure that rural communities and the businesses within them need to prosper and grow.

We are calling on the federal government to maintain the services of Canada Post, especially in rural areas.

• (1015)

[English]

ADOPTIVE PARENTS BENEFITS

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, my petition calls for equal employment insurance benefits for adoptive parents. Adoption is an important and essential act in a compassionate, caring and just society. Under the current EI program, adoptive parents are given 35 weeks of paid leave followed by a further 15 weeks of unpaid leave. Under the law, a biological mother is given both the first 35 weeks and the latter 15 as paid leave.

In Canada adoptions are often expensive. They are lengthy and stressful to the adoptive parents. Studies have shown that an additional 15 weeks of paid leave would help parents better support their adoptive children and handle many of the specific issues that they must face.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to support Bill C-413, which would amend the Employment Insurance Act and the Canada Labour Code to ensure that an adoptive parent would be entitled to the same number of weeks of paid leave as would the biological mother of a newborn child.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, if Questions Nos. 446, 447 and 448 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 446—**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:**

With respect to the current pandemic of new influenza A (H1N1): (a) what is the key leadership shown by the organizational reporting chart, from the two lead ministries, the Public Health Agency of Canada and Public Safety Canada, through to the deputy ministers; (b) what is the decision-making process to determine which of the two ministries leads on issues; (c) what, if any, funding requests have been made by government departments for pandemic planning since the beginning of the pandemic in Canada; (d) what, if any, additional funding is required to ensure all government departments have tested their H1N1 plans and rolled them out to their employees; (e) what, if any, specific agreements have been signed with the provinces and territories, and which, if any, agreements still need to be signed; (f) what are the government's identified critical services, what is the decision-making process to reduce services if required, and who has responsibility for these decisions; (g) how will the government acquire and distribute medical countermeasures if required; (h) what guidance is being provided to foreign missions, including consulates, embassies, high commissions and trade offices, and what is the decision-making process to reduce services, or repatriate staff; (i) what guidance is being provided to the Canadian Forces, including the army, the air force and the navy, and what recommendations are being made for military personnel; (j) with regard to recommendations being made to the Canadian Forces and military personnel concerning vaccinations, what processes are in place to (i) re-evaluate policies as required, (ii) ensure legal compliance and respect ethical considerations, (iii) ensure protection of our troops in Afghanistan; (k) on what date was the pandemic vaccine ordered, and what, if any, effect did having only one supplier, or the decision to use adjuvant, had on the delivery date for the H1N1 vaccine; (l) what, if any, actions is the government taking to investigate claims of unpublished Canadian data regarding vaccination, and what updates are available in Canada and internationally; (m) what, if any, recommendations will the government make in terms of timing of seasonal and H1N1 vaccines, why was priority setting or sequencing different from that of the World Health Organization, and what considerations have been given to possible impacts of varying provincial and territorial vaccination plans on short-term and long-term trust in public health officials and vaccination rates; (n) what, if any, oversight exists to ensure Canadian communities have H1N1 pandemic plans in place, and what specific recommendations are being made for those who live in poverty or in crowded housing conditions, including prisons and shelters; (o) what, if any, gaps exist in medical surge capacity; (p) what, if any, monitoring is being undertaken for influenza-like illness in daycares, schools, colleges, and universities, and, if so, what patterns are occurring; (q) what percentage of people who died of H1N1 during the last four months had secondary bacterial infection, and what, if any, underlying health conditions did they have, and how might possible secondary bacterial infections be reduced in at-risk populations; (r) what, if any, ethical guidelines are in place to allow for consistent decision-making regarding ventilators; (s) what research, if any, has been undertaken to determine what percentage of healthcare workers might be concerned to work during a possible second wave, and what mitigating efforts have been taken to address this possible challenge; (t) what, if any, recommendations exist regarding "duty to care" and institutional supports to healthcare workers during a pandemic; (u) what efforts are being taken to boost vaccination rates among pregnant women, and how is this information being conveyed to medical practitioners and expectant mothers; (v) what, if any, consideration has been given to the construction of field hospitals in remote and isolated areas; (w) with historical hindsight, and knowledge of increased vulnerability to H1N1 of Aboriginal communities due to underlying health conditions and socio-economic problems, what, if any, containment measures were taken to slow the spread of the H1N1 virus in the spring; (x) what preventive and treatment measures are being implemented to reduce the percentage of Aboriginal people who will be hospitalized, who will stay in intensive care units, and who will die, compared to the whole of the Canadian population; and (y) what, if any, consideration has been given to share a portion of Canada's antiviral medication, vaccine allotments, and flu management kits with developing countries?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 447—**Mr. Robert Oliphant:**

With regard to the government's Economic Action Plan, for each announcement in the electoral district of Don Valley West: (a) what was (i) the date of announcement, (ii) the amount of stimulus spending announced, (iii) the department which announced it; and (b) was there a public event associated with the

announcement and, if so, what was the cost of that event and which elected officials, if any, were invited to appear?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 448—**Mr. Robert Oliphant:**

Concerning the Akwesasne Mohawk border dispute: (a) what discussions, if any, were held about alternatives for a solution to the Akwesasne border dispute; (b) what negotiations, if any, were held with the United States about relocating the Canadian border post to American soil, similar to the current agreement to allow U.S. Customs to operate inside some major Canadian airports; (c) what is the anticipated cost of relocating the border post to its new location; (d) what is the assessed cost to cross-border trade during the closure of the Cornwall Island border crossing; and (e) what is the assessed cost to tourism during the closure of the Cornwall Island border crossing?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The House resumed from October 9 consideration of the motion that Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Colombia and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-23 and I, along with my NDP colleagues, am proud to speak in opposition to the bill.

The bill is about free trade with a government that refuses to recognize human rights and a government that is complicit in human rights violations. The bill is also about free trade with a government that refuses to recognize the need to protect our planet and our environment, and that is complicit in taking our environmental resources for granted.

Canada signed a free trade agreement on November 21, 2008 and the legislation we are debating today is a result of that agreement and would implement the agreement signed between our two countries.

Even though the agreement is signed, it is not too late, which is why we are taking turns standing in the House to talk about the problems with this agreement. We are trying to wake the government up to the fact that this is a very bad deal. It is bad for Canada and it is bad for Colombia.

On May 25, the Bloc Québécois moved an important amendment to Bill C-23 which I believe is important enough to reread in this honourable House. The amendment reads:

Government Orders

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

"the House decline to give second reading to Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Colombia and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, because the government concluded this agreement while the Standing Committee on International Trade was considering the matter, thereby demonstrating its disrespect for democratic institutions".

That is a very important and precisely worded amendment. The amendment is important because it restates the purpose of the bill to say that, in fact, members of this House would refuse to give second reading to this bill. We refuse to give second reading because it is not a bill that is good for Canada and it is not a bill that is good for Colombia.

I have previously stated in the House some of the most egregious aspects of this FTA. As we know, the CCFTA consists of three parts. There is the main FTA text but there is also a labour side agreement and an environmental protection side agreement.

The areas of concern are as follows: First, this agreement shows a failure on labour rights protection. Colombia is one of the most dangerous countries on earth for trade unionists. They are regularly the victims of violence, intimidation and even assassination by paramilitary groups linked to the Colombian government.

The CCFTA does not include tough labour standards. By putting these labour agreements, as I said, in a side agreement outside of the main text and without any kind of vigorous enforcement mechanism will not encourage Colombia to improve its horrendous human rights situation for workers but will actually justify the use of violence.

This agreement is also a failure on environmental protection. The environment issue again is addressed in a side agreement and there is no enforcement. Anybody who has ever looked at law, legislation or policy knows that if there is no enforcement it is meaningless. There is no enforcement mechanism here to force either Canada or Colombia to respect environmental rights.

We have seen in the past how agreements like this are unenforceable. For example, I will draw attention to one agreement we all know and that is NAFTA. We have never seen a successful suit brought under the NAFTA side agreement on labour.

Another aspect of the agreement that is problematic is the investor chapter copied from NAFTA's chapter 11 investor rights. The CCFTA provides powerful rights to private companies to sue governments, enforceable through investor state arbitration panels. This is particularly worrying because of the many multinational Canadian oil and mining companies in Colombia.

The arbitration system that is set up in chapter 11 gives foreign companies the ability to challenge legitimate Canadian environmental labour and social protections. Giving this opportunity to private businesses in Colombia and elsewhere would further erode Canada and Colombia's abilities to pass laws and regulations that are actually in the public interest.

Another area that we find problematic is the agricultural tariffs. Colombia's poverty is directly linked to agricultural development where 22% of employment is agricultural. An end to tariffs on Canadian cereals, pork and beef would flood the market with cheap

products. What would this mean? This would mean thousands of lost jobs for Canadians.

• (1020)

Bill C-23 would also seriously destabilize the Canadian sugar industry. Importing sugar from Colombia would threaten the closure of at least one of the Canadian sugar plants in the west and would result in job losses of up to 500 employees and 250 sugar beet growers; all this while at the same time Colombia is not a significant trading partner for Canada. It is our fifth largest trading partner in Latin America; all this while at the same time 2,690 trade unionists have been murdered in Colombia since 1986 and 31 trade unionists alone this year; and all this when nearly 200,000 hectares of natural forest are lost in Colombia every year due to agriculture, logging, mining, energy development and construction, and we are complicit in this.

Free trade does not work in this context. What is the solution?

I would like to share with the House an idea that is familiar to many Nova Scotians and that is fair trade. Just Us! Coffee Roasters Co-Op really brought this idea of fair trade to Nova Scotia. Fair trade is a trading partnership based on dialogue, transparency and respect that seeks greater equality in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to and securing the rights of marginalized producers and workers, especially in the south.

Fair trade organizations that are backed by consumers are engaged actively in supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for change, change in the rules and practices of conventional international trade, which is what we are seeing with this agreement.

The strategic intent of fair trade is threefold. First, deliberately work with marginalized producers and workers in order to help them move from a position of vulnerability to one of security and economic self-sufficiency. Second, empower producers and workers as stakeholders in their own organizations. Third, actively play a wider role in the global arena to achieve greater equality and equity in international trade.

To put it more simply, fair trade is an alliance between producers and consumers that cuts out the middle man. In this process, it empowers producers and it gives them greater dignity and a fairer price for their products. It provides consumers with high quality products that they know are more sustainable from both a social and environmental point of view.

Just Us! Coffee Roasters is Canada's first fair trade coffee roaster and it is located in the town of Wolfville, Nova Scotia. There are two Just Us! Coffee Roasters shops in my riding of Halifax, one on Barrington Street, which is in the heart of our business district, and the other one on Spring Garden Road, which is very close to the campus of Dalhousie University.

Government Orders

Both those coffee shops are touchstones for our community. They are not only a place to meet friends, a place to buy ethical products and a part of our local economy, but they are also doing more to support our local economy. They offer food prepared by local food suppliers, like Terroir Local Source Catering and Unique Asian Catering, which are small businesses located in the community of Halifax.

I applaud Just Us! Coffee Roasters for leading by example and for showing the country that fair trade is possible. It is my hope that the bill fails and that, instead of rewarding countries that fail to recognize human rights, we work with them to develop trade in a fair and equitable way.

Those are the reasons that I stand in opposition to Bill C-23.

• (1025)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her very good speech and offer some solutions to our trade policy.

I would like to ask her a question with regard to the ideological slant of the Conservatives who are pursuing this. They often talk about how tough they are on crime and how tough they are on drugs and that whole agenda here in Canada, but at the same time they are willing to open up our borders for a privileged trading relationship.

What we really need to emphasize is that we do have trade with Colombia right now. It does go on between our two countries and will always go on with regard to a number of different goods and services. However, what we are doing is considering a privileged trading relationship that is the exception. This is with a narco state that has not only human rights issues with trade unionists but also drug production that ends up in Canada.

Does the member know why the Conservatives, who pretend to be so tough on crime and drugs, would want to engage in a privileged trading relationship with such a narco state?

Ms. Megan Leslie: Madam Speaker, that is an excellent and very insightful question about bringing down the crime control issue with international trade.

It is all smoke and mirrors. We are tough on crime and free trade is good for everybody. If we say it often enough, it does not make it true.

I worked with a young man in my community of Halifax who said to me, "My dad sold rock and my uncle sold rock. What am I supposed to do? All I know how to do is sell drugs on the street corner. I don't know how to make a resumé. I don't know how to show up on time for work and communicate appropriately with my boss. We need programs to help me understand how to get a job but also how to keep a job". We are not listening to the experts, the experts being the kids on the street who need assistance.

I will point out that our international trade critic has worked directly with people in Colombia and has asked them what they think of this free trade agreement. The experts, the people on the ground, are saying that trade unionists are being killed on the shop room floor and that the agreement is bad for their environment and their country.

The problem is that we have a government that refuses to listen to the real experts, the experts who are actually being impacted by the laws that we are arbitrarily drafting in some back room in the House of Commons. It makes no sense. We need to talk to Colombians about what they need. We need to talk about youth on the street who are at risk to find out what they need. That is how we should move forward on both of these issues.

• (1030)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague from Halifax gave her usual ground level speech about an initiative in the House. I wonder if the member could speak to another side of this proposed so-called free trade agreement, a free trade agreement that is free of any conditions to protect the environments of Canadians or Colombians.

Every time we raise concerns about the government's failure to act on environmental protection measures and climate change, it speaks of balance, and yet this agreement and the side agreement on the environment has severely pared back any environmental conditions as found in the agreement that we have with Mexico and the United States.

Does the member think that environmental conditions are just as important to fair trade?

Ms. Megan Leslie: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her counsel and mentoring on environment issues. She is doing an excellent job of representing environmental issues in the House.

I agree with her wholeheartedly. I would come back to the fact that the environmental regulations are a side agreement. They are not included in the main body of the text to show they are important to the government. There also are no enforcement mechanisms, which means it is completely meaningless. We cannot do *x* and, if we do *x*, nothing will happen. It makes no sense. We need something that is enforceable and we need it to be in the main body of the agreement.

As for her question about whether the environment should be considered when it comes to fair trade, I say, wholeheartedly, yes. We will see that. I used Just Us! Coffee Roasters as an example. Not only is it about fair trade but it is looking at shade-grown beans, which are more ecologically sustainable, and it is looking at the impacts on the environment in all of the countries where it works.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I could say I am pleased to rise here today, but the truth is, I am not.

I do not understand how a government can introduce a bill in the House of Commons that aims to implement a free trade agreement with Colombia. I find it shocking. It is appalling that a government should favour the mining industry at the expense of human rights in Colombia.

First of all, people here have spoken out to say that this agreement favours the mining industry in several ways. The agreement's provisions have been explained in a number of documents. Colombia is one of the main countries where the mining industry can still mine coal.

Government Orders

If a mine is established in the middle of a village, mining companies have no problem displacing all the people. As we all know, anyone who resists will be killed. Is that what we want? Does Canada want to send a message to the entire world that it cares more about an industry than about people? We want to protect those people. This kind of situation cannot be tolerated by Canadians.

Human beings have rights, workers have rights and children have rights, such as the right not to work and not to be exploited. We do not let companies break the rules here, but we are ready to help them do it elsewhere. I am dumbfounded by this. Moreover, so many crimes go unpunished in Colombia as a matter of course that human rights groups believe there is collusion between Colombian politicians and paramilitary forces. At this very moment, more than 30 members of the congress are under arrest in Colombia. I do not think that Colombian parliamentarians, as a group, are particularly trustworthy. I have said it before, and I will say it again: I do not understand how a country like Canada can pursue free trade with Colombia without a thought for the Colombian people. It is beyond comprehension.

The Conservative government would have us believe that things are much better than they used to be. But that is not what we have been reading and hearing about what is going on in Colombia. We have been hearing that in 2008 the number of crimes committed by paramilitary groups rose by 41%, compared to 14% the year before. That means that in 2008, the paramilitary crime rate surged by 55%. Is that what we want to be a part of? Are these the people we want to help?

Maybe everything is fine and dandy in Colombia, but there is one thing I do not understand. The Conservatives should listen carefully, because I did not make this up. It is right there on Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada's website. The website recommends that people avoid all non-essential travel to the city of Cali and most rural areas of Colombia because of the constantly changing security situation and the difficulty for the Colombian authorities to secure all of its territory. And where do these mining companies operate? In rural regions.

• (1035)

We are told that everything is fine and that we should trade with Colombia, but on the other hand, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada tells us that we should not go there because it is dangerous. It is dangerous for the people of Canada and the people of Colombia, but for the mining industry alone, it is not dangerous. That industry faces no danger, because it hires the paramilitary forces and does business with them. I will come back to Foreign Affairs later.

The government is going to tell us at some point that Canada does business with Colombia and that it does good things. I will tell hon. members what it does with Colombia. Canada buys only raw materials from Colombia. Energy products accounted for 31% of exports in 2007, while agricultural and agri-food products accounted for 58%. It is the mining industry that the government wants to protect. Canada buys a total of \$138 million worth of coal and related products, \$115 million worth of coffee, \$72 million worth of bananas and \$62 million worth of cut flowers. That is our trade with

Colombia. Is it profitable for us? No, it is not. Can we do without it? Yes we can.

I repeat, and this is the important point in the free trade agreement with Colombia, the only thing we do not want is for Canada to take the people of Colombia hostage in an effort to promote the mining industry. That is what the government is trying to do. I totally disagree with giving even two minutes' thought to helping an industry to the detriment of a people. It is unfair. It is unthinkable.

I return to the subject of Colombian exports. They do not come from urban regions. They come, rather, from Colombia's most remote rural regions. It is here, in these remote regions, that the greatest wealth of natural resources is to be found, but it is here, too, that the most violence is to be found. To continue in this vein, it is here that 87% of the forced population displacements occur, as well as 82% of abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law and 83% of the murders of union leaders. Continuing on, according to the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, this would lead one to believe that there is substantial evidence that Canadian investment in these regions of Colombia is linked to human rights violations.

I am not making that up. It is taken from a report of the Standing Committee on International Trade of June 2008 on concerns over the effects on the environment and human rights in connection with the free trade agreement with Colombia. I can go even farther than that. It is clear and simple. A group from the Standing Committee on International Trade carried out studies to find out whether, through the free trade agreement, something could be done in support of human rights and the environment. Democracy here in this House is not the kind of democracy that should be copied around the world, and I will tell you why.

This government authorized the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development to go and see what was happening in Colombia in order to prepare a report, including conclusions on the free trade agreement. The members did not even get time to draft the report before the government signed the free trade agreement with Colombia. Is that the sort of democracy they want in this House? They ask people to prepare a report and then ignore it. Is this the government Canadians and Quebeckers want here? I do not think this is the answer.

I want to continue from where I left off. There was talk of areas where a high degree of caution is required. The exception to this would be some parts of the coffee growing area near Bogotá and resort areas with established tourist industries. People should avoid travelling to Colombia.

• (1040)

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his speech on free trade between Canada and Colombia. I completely understand his passion and interest in this subject.

I would like him to elaborate on the fact that the government is eliminating the possibility of pressuring Colombia into respecting human rights in that country, and why the government is eliminating this possibility.

Government Orders

Mr. Robert Vincent: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her question, which I will answer in a roundabout way.

We want this government to take responsibility and exert pressure for human rights in Colombia, but it is not even capable of doing so here at home. I am referring to the older worker adjustment program, but the government is not interested in older people. It wants to grant an additional 5 to 20 weeks of employment insurance benefits for those people who lose their jobs, instead of introducing a program for older worker adjustment, or POWA.

How can we trust a government that is not even willing to help its fellow citizens who live here and pay taxes?

What makes us think that this government could have any influence on human rights in Colombia when it does not even respect them here?

Worse yet, the government will not even adopt anti-scab legislation to prevent people from replacing workers who are on strike. How are we to believe that it has any consideration for people in another country?

The only thing Canada wants to achieve today, with this free trade agreement, is to open the door for the mining industries to operate mines in Colombia. The government will make things easier for them by doing nothing to help that country and by doing nothing to help people who, like hostages, have to work for these companies.

• (1045)

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his fine exposé on the current situation in Colombia as well as in this House.

We have been discussing the pros and cons of Bill C-23 for several months now. On this side of the House, we think there are a lot more cons than pros. That is only to be expected.

As always, the Bloc Québécois is opposed to all injustice, not only in Quebec and Canada but everywhere in the world. This bill, unfortunately, would sanction a number of injustices.

When the government says that no crime victim or any one whose rights have been trampled, even here in Canada, should be ignored and tells us that it has a very busy law and order agenda, I think it is forgetting that there are places elsewhere in the world where people do not have the ability or even the possibility of defending themselves.

At present in Colombia, 30% of the people who in the government are being seriously investigated for corruption, collusion and all sorts of things and 60% of the rest are suspected of engaging in activities that are not exactly legitimate in view of their positions and responsibilities.

Every day in the House, members from one party or another rise to praise someone from their community or someone whom they know to remind us—because this person is deceased—of how important the person was to his or her family, children, colleagues at work and the people he or she met on a daily basis.

At times like those, I think it would be great for us to stop treating the victims in Colombia—the trade unionists and murder victims—as mere statistics despite what the Colombian government has to say

and despite its efforts to minimize these crimes. We know of 109 murders between January 2007 and June 2008. I want to list a few of them and it would be good if my colleagues on the other side could start seeing them as human beings, as fathers and mothers of families and as people with responsibilities in society. These people are dead today because of their convictions and their work. I want to mention the following:

Maria Teresa Jesus Chicaiza Burbano, killed on January 15, 2007; Maria Theresa Silva Reyes, killed on March 28, 2007; Ana Silvia Melo Rodriguez, killed on May 19, 2007; Marleny Berrio de Rodriguez, killed on June 11, 2007; Leonidas Sylva Castro, killed on November 2, 2007; and Maria del Carmen Mesa Paschoa, killed on February 8, 2008.

Other people who have been murdered include Maria Teresa Trujillo, killed on February 9, 2008; Carmen Cecilia Carvajal Ramirez, killed on March 4, 2008; Leonidas Gomes Rozo, killed on March 8, 2008; Victor Manuel Munoz, killed on March 12, 2008; Ignacio Andrade, killed on March 15, 2008; Manuel Antonio Jimenez, on March 15, 2008; Jose Fernando Quiroz, on March 16, 2008; Jose Gregorio Astros, on March 18, 2008; Julio Cesar Trochez, on March 22, 2008; Adolfo Gonzales Montes, on March 22, 2008; Luz Mariela Diaz Lopez, on April 1, 2008; Emerson Ivan Herrera, on April 1, 2008; Rafael Antonio Leal Medina, on April 4, 2008; Omar Ariza, on April 7, 2008; Jesus Heberto Caballero Ariza, on April 16, 2008; Marcello Vergara Sanchez, on June 5, 2008; and Vilma Carcamo Bianco, on May 9, 2009.

• (1050)

I could go on naming names for another 20 minutes. How many victims do there have to be in Colombia before this government wakes up and realizes that it is not a good idea to be negotiating a free trade agreement at this time with a country that has no more respect for human beings than this?

All of the persons I have named were unionists. All of them were working to improve the living conditions of people living in Colombia and trying to make a better life for themselves. But this government does not hear the names of the dead and murdered. It hears them only when it is in its interest to hear them, when it can spread propaganda, when it can use them.

This government should stop using the misfortune of others for its own advantage and start respecting people who work to earn a living.

At the moment, working people in Colombia are subjected on a daily basis to violence, murders and crimes. We cannot stand by and let this sort of thing go on. If we agree to this free trade agreement today, we are agreeing to the continuation of these murders of men, women and children.

I do not know if my colleagues are like me, but I believe that all of us have to look into our hearts, stop thinking about profit only—obviously, there is short-term profit involved here—and stop thinking that we can impose our law on the whole world. That is not the way it works, and that is not the way it will work in Colombia, where the government is corrupt virtually from top to bottom.

Government Orders

Do you think that the Colombian government will be suddenly cleansed of all its impurities because we sign a free trade agreement today with Colombia? One would have to be a little naive to think that.

Indeed, my colleague from Compton—Stanstead is right. You have to be a little naive or acting in very bad faith to believe such a thing. You have to be a little naive or acting in very bad faith to try to make this House vote in favour of a bill that has not been thought out and for which no serious consultation has been done. As my colleague from Shefford so aptly said, the only consultations that were done were not used to develop a free trade agreement that would stand up and take account of the rights and lives of the people in Colombia.

If we adopt this agreement, if we pass this bill, I will be ashamed as a Quebecker and a Canadian. I am ashamed that we would support such a bill. I am ashamed that we are trying every day, through the Justice minister, to introduce bills that will put crooks in prison using minimum sentences, with no consideration for judicial discretion. I am ashamed that we are trying to introduce bills that would throw a large part of the population, aboriginals primarily, into prison without any opportunity for rehabilitation. I am ashamed that we are permitting a corrupt government to keep on turning a blind eye to crime and the murder of its citizens who are doing everything they can to give the people living down there a better life.

I simply cannot believe this. I cannot believe that the members in the other opposition parties are turning a blind eye too. I do not believe it. If we stand up for the rights of the people we represent, we have to stand up, by virtue of our status as members of Parliament, for the rights of the people we represent everywhere in the world and for the rights of human beings.

●(1055)

The unionists have come to meet with us and let us know about these odious crimes committed against their sisters and brothers. We know perfectly well that they have not been heard by the government.

Is my time up, Madam Speaker? Very well then.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member will no doubt have an opportunity to continue her comments during questions and comments.

The hon. member for Shefford.

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Laval for her fantastic presentation. She gave a very good explanation of what is happening in Colombia and what the free trade treaty involves.

I would like someone to tell me why the Canadian government is so keen to sign a free trade agreement with Colombia. I cannot understand or imagine why it wants to do so. The only thing I can think of is that it is under pressure from the mining lobby, which wants to open doors in Colombia because it will benefit mining companies. Who will go to work there? I am not sure many people from here will go to work in Colombia. We want to exploit the Colombians and their land. For whose benefit? For the benefit of the mining companies that will stash this money in the Cayman Islands

to avoid paying tax. What good is the agreement if human rights are not respected in Colombia?

I would like to ask my colleague what she thinks of this option.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague. I also do not understand why this government is in such a hurry to give in to the lobbyists' demands. But I am not surprised.

The Bloc Québécois members are not the only ones who are opposed to this free trade treaty. The opposition members are not the only ones who are opposed to this free trade treaty. Justice for Colombia is an organization based in England, not Colombia. It is based in England, where all the unionized workers support our cause. Nearly three million United Steelworkers of America support our cause. As far as I know, we are not the only ones who support this cause. We should not be so crazy, so naive.

What is the government waiting for to stop kowtowing constantly to Bay Street? What is it waiting for to stand up and refuse to aid and abet these mining companies, which will keep on committing abuses and will enable these killings to continue?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for her passionate presentation to the House on this important debate.

Obviously, there have been a lot of discussions going on with regard to this free trade bill, particularly as it relates to human rights matters and specifically related to unionists. I have come to understand that the death or human rights abuses of unionists also occurs in a number of other countries and at the same levels of incidence. I am not aware of the details, but the member may have some details on that.

Second, the standing committee that looked at this whole issue regarding the human rights concerns had reported to the House that it felt that there should be an independent human rights assessment done as part of the consideration of this matter.

I have also come to understand that Amnesty International has refused to do so—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order. I must give the hon. member time to respond.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Laval.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

Obviously, such acts of violence are committed in other countries as well. We are very aware of that. However, there is a common thread. Where mining companies are present, there are union problems and human rights violations. For example, in Romania, the rights of workers have not been respected. People who lived around the mines had to be moved. These people have ongoing health problems because mining companies have little respect for them.

Government Orders

My colleague is knowledgeable about all aspects of human rights. Yes, the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms should apply and the *Ligue des droits et libertés* should be allowed to review this agreement and add anything that is missing. This agreement currently has very important gaps.

• (1100)

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to speak to the bill again.

Let me begin by following up on the comments made by the member for Mississauga South when he asked a question of the Bloc member. It certainly is the case that in 2008, the House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade recommended that no agreement be signed with Colombia until the human rights situation there has improved. It also recommended that a human rights impact assessment be undertaken to determine the real impact of a trade agreement. The government, of course, has ignored this report.

With that information in mind and the fact we have known about this for a year now and that members of the House are very familiar with it, as it keeps being brought up over and over again, the issue is, why is the Liberal Party not opposing this trade agreement? Why are the Liberals complicit with the government in trying to ram this through?

I appreciate the member for Mississauga South, because I know that on this particular issue and others, I do not really think he is in sync with his caucus at all. The member for Kings—Hants has stood up in the House and the tone and content of his comments are certainly, to my mind, very different, if not the exact opposite. It sounds to me like there may be some sort of mini-war going on within the Liberal caucus over there, and I certainly hope that the member for Mississauga South could win on this one, because we are doing our best on this side to hold up the bill as long as possible, perhaps to give him enough time to win the war and to get his caucus members onside. He is quite aware that together we form quite a formidable force in the House. The three opposition parties actually are the majority, and if we could just get the Liberals onside on this particular issue, it would go a long way to stopping this initiative.

The history of the Liberal Party has been all over the place on this issue and many others, but certainly there is a core group in the Liberal Party that, I would think, is having a lot of difficulty supporting this particular free trade agreement.

Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Colombia and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Colombia was introduced in the House by the Minister of International Trade on March 26, 2009. Bill C-23 implements three agreements and the respective annexes signed by Canada and the Republic of Colombia on November 21, 2008. The first of these is the bilateral free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia.

The Canada-Colombia free trade agreement provides for the liberalization of various types of economic activities: trade in goods, trade in services, foreign investments and government procurements. It has already been pointed out by members of the Bloc and NDP

how small this amount of trade really is. In fact the previous Bloc member suggested that this free trade agreement is all about the mining companies, the mining sector, and supporting the mining companies without any regard to the human rights record found in Colombia right now.

The two other agreements dealt with in the bill are side agreements to the free trade agreement, the agreement on the environment between Canada and the Republic of Colombia and the agreement on labour cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Colombia.

The environment agreement seeks to ensure that each party enforces its environmental laws. However, if a country does not have any environmental laws, it is hard to enforce them in the first place.

The labour agreement seeks to ensure that the domestic law of both states respects basic labour rights and is duly enforced. The latter agreement also provides for the possibility of resorting to arbitral panels to settle trade-related disputes that involve a persistent pattern of failure to comply with obligations under the labour agreement, an option that is not created in the environment agreement.

• (1105)

The wording in agreements can sound very good, but at the end of the day, it is the will, the implementation, and enforcement of the agreements that make them successful or not successful. We do not want to get involved in an agreement like this when we know that the basic bedrock, the basic infrastructure, is not there to promote the proper type of results we would expect from an agreement like this.

We in our party want to develop free trade agreements that promote fair trade. We on this side of the House are all in favour of reducing barriers and we are supporting fair trade as opposed to free trade. We have seen what sorts of agreements have been developed over the last few years with successive governments in this country. I recall the Liberal Party in 1988 and its leader at the time, John Turner, who was running his entire election campaign against the Mulroney government's Free Trade Agreement with the United States, and saying he was going to eliminate it if he became prime minister. Of course, the Liberals said they would eliminate the GST and do a lot of other things in their red book back in 1993, but which they totally ignored when they came to power.

Currently Canada is party to five free trade agreements, all of which have been implemented through legislation. There is the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, the North American Free Trade Agreement, the Canada-Chile Free Trade Agreement, and the Canada-Israel and Canada-Costa Rica free trade agreements. The two others we have been dealing with lately have been the free trade agreement with Peru and the one with the European Free Trade Association.

Government Orders

Bill C-23 implements the three agreements between Canada and Colombia through a set of provisions that will form the core of a stand-alone piece of legislation, the proposed Canada-Colombia free trade agreement implementation act. It also contains amendments to a number of existing pieces of legislation: the Canadian International Trade Tribunal Act, the Commercial Arbitration Act, the Crown Liability and Proceedings Act, the Customs Act, the Customs Tariff, the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development Act, the Export and Import Permits Act and the Financial Administration Act.

I mentioned that the extent of trade in goods between Canada and Colombia is relatively modest at the current time. In 2008, two-way merchandise trade between Canada and Colombia totalled just over \$1.3 billion and Canadian merchandise exports to Colombia totalled \$703 million. The major exports include agricultural products such as wheat, barley, lentils, as well as industrial products, paper products and heavy machinery. Canadian merchandise imports from Colombia totalled \$643 million and consisted of major imports such as coffee, bananas, coal, oil, sugar and flowers. Having said that in regard to those figures, I believe that Colombia is our fifth largest trading partner in the area. It is not even in our top four trading partners in the area.

Bill C-23 has attracted considerable attention, as we have pointed out and continue to point out. The groups and individuals opposed to the implementation of the free trade agreement oppose it because of the country's abysmal human rights record. The previous Bloc member read the names of people who have been killed, and I have a similar list as well. People are being killed on a daily basis in Colombia and the government seems to ignore that fact. As a matter of fact, the president was invited to appear before the committee and the Conservatives are blithely ignoring the record of the country, all because the Conservatives have this tunnel vision that they can sign these free trade agreements that are somehow going to lift everybody up. That in fact does not work out. What we have seen in Colombia and other countries is a degradation of the environment after the free trade agreements have been put into place.

● (1110)

That is why we need a fair trade agreement. On that basis, I think we should certainly look at a different approach here, and only after the human rights record is straightened out in Colombia.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have here the Amnesty International report for 2009. I would like to read the conclusion and ask for the member's comments. It says:

Throughout the Americas region, human rights defenders continue to work for a world where everyone is able to live with dignity and where all human rights are respected. To do this, defenders often have to challenge powerful social and economic elites, as well as the inertia and complicity of governments that are failing to honour their obligations to promote and defend human rights.

That is one of the reasons I wanted to participate in the debate and why I am troubled with the trade-offs here. However, I am moved by Amnesty International's generic statement and I wonder if the member would care to comment on it.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Madam Speaker, it certainly is a well-known and documented fact that numerous people have been killed in Colombia over the last few years and that they continue to be killed. We are not helping the problem by facilitating or giving the

Government of Colombia what it actually wants: the respectability that comes from having a free trade agreement with Canada.

In fact, I believe that the United Kingdom has recently ended its military aid to Colombia because of the human rights record there. We have some debate about the Americans and what they and their Congress are doing with regard to their agreement with Colombia, but my understanding is that they have put a hold on it as well.

What kind of encouragement does the Colombian government have to rectify its human rights record when governments such as ours entertain and encourage them by offering them free trade agreements? They should be the pariahs of the world and be forced to clean up their human rights record first before governments such as Canada's or the United States' give them free trade agreements.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his wise words and comments.

The question here is somewhat of a chicken and egg debate in terms of what countries do with regard to trade. Around the world, Canada has the unique role in being able to offer countries its reputation when trading with them. When Canada signs a free trade agreement with a country, it is giving its blessing to that country's role in the region.

Colombia has struggled for many years with fighting paramilitaries, and with the increase in the drug trade and all the rest. It is now in the midst of an arms race, which I think has to be brought into this debate.

I raised with my Liberal colleagues down the way, who seem to continue to ignore it, that after almost two decades, South America is going through an arms resurgence right now. Billions of dollars in arms are going into the region, creating what could be a very volatile situation in some very unstable regimes, particularly Colombia right now.

The idea of Canada entering into the fray and creating a free trade scenario, in which arms are not even mentioned in the agreement whatsoever, brings many concerns to Colombians who are fighting for and advocating peace, and are seeking peaceful measures with their neighbours to the south and north.

I am wondering if my colleague can comment on some among the Liberals. I know it is a big tent, but it is a circus tent if they allow the idea that one can both oppose and support something so volatile as a trade agreement with a country seeking an arms deal.

● (1115)

Mr. Jim Maloway: Madam Speaker, the member is absolutely right. I do feel sorry for the Liberal member in this particular debate, but I am eternally hopeful that some common sense may prevail within the Liberal caucus in the next short period of time.

Government Orders

The fact is that 2,690 trade unionists have been murdered in Colombia since 1986. In 2008, the number was even higher than that, and we have statistics here showing there have been murders as late as just a couple of weeks ago.

This problem is going on unabated. No matter what sort of promises the government or the committee thinks they are getting from the President of Colombia, when he showed up before committee—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order. Resuming debate. The hon. member for Joliette.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this extremely important debate. First of all, I would like to congratulate the member from Compton—Stanstead on the birth of her first granddaughter on Sunday. I believe this event should be acknowledged in the House. We have a future sovereigntist. Congratulations.

I will now turn to the bill. I believe this is exactly the type of bill that is very problematic for Canadian and Quebec societies and all western societies in terms of relations with a developing society that has significant economic and political difficulties. It also poses a problem with respect to what tack to take in its trade relations and the ensuing political, social, environmental and cultural ramifications.

Unfortunately this government is in denial about something that is extremely important. Of course, the Liberals denied it also when they were in power. These free trade agreements have an impact on trade and the economy as well as having social, environmental and cultural implications.

In our opinion, this agreement contains nothing to guarantee that the people of Colombia will benefit from it. That is also true for Canada and Quebec, but to a lesser extent. Our moral responsibility is to ensure that the agreements Canada negotiates with other countries are to both parties' advantage. I am thinking of Colombia in this case, but the same thing may arise in relation to Costa Rica, with which we have negotiated a free trade agreement that was strictly to Canada's advantage. Is it morally acceptable for parliamentarians to endorse this kind of agreement and this kind of thing being done by the Canadian government?

Once again, the Conservatives have taken up the torch from the Liberals.

Take the example of investment protection. This free trade agreement with Colombia gives rights to Canadian multinationals. It will be said that rights are also given to Colombian multinationals, but are there such multinationals, and how many of them do business with Canada? They are being given the same right as a government to go before the courts to challenge provisions adopted by the federal and provincial governments, including Quebec, or by municipalities. Based on this agreement, multinationals can challenge the legality of certain decisions in the name of private property rights, the right to profit and to invest, no holds barred.

This new provision appeared in the North American Free Trade Agreement when it was negotiated with Mexico. It absolutely did not exist in the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the

United States. It seems that this provision was introduced to defend against forms of economic nationalism such as have been seen in Mexico. This is like asserting total control over the governments of those countries. I am talking about Mexico, but it was also true for Costa Rica, and now for Colombia.

This is a totally unacceptable agreement and that is why there is such strong resistance in Parliament to adopting it without thoroughly debating it. It is not that we are opposed to protecting investments. For example, in the trade disputes between Bombardier and Embraer, the rules of the World Trade Organization are being undermined. In a case like that, there is an arbitration tribunal where Canada represents Bombardier and Brazil represents Embraer. Embraer or Bombardier do not appear directly before the special tribunals that handle cases relating to NAFTA or this agreement to challenge a decision made democratically and completely legally for the welfare of the public that parliamentarians are supposed to represent. Not to mention Colombia's tragic track record when it comes to respect for human rights.

● (1120)

It is all very well to tell us there have been improvements, but there is a long way to go before we, as a society, can associate ourselves with impunity with what is going on there. As I said, there are human rights abuses. People are harassed and even outright killed by paramilitary organizations. I can attest to this, because we have a community of Colombian refugees in the riding of Joliette, particularly around Joliette itself, who came here because of the political situation in Colombia. Even today, there are Colombians who come to join their families in the greater Joliette region because their lives have been threatened down there by the paramilitary forces or by FARC. There is a human rights situation that is absolutely incompatible with the rule of law that Canada should be advancing on the international stage.

Workers' rights, the right to unionize, the right of association, the right to strike, the right to bargain freely, none of those are respected in Colombia. I can attest to this myself, because as Secretary General of the CSN I worked for many years with Colombian trade unionists whose lives had been threatened. There are people who have come to Canada and Quebec to testify about the abuses in the situation that people in the labour movement lived in, and who, once they went back home, were unfortunately again victims of harassment, or worse still, were outright killed. We cannot accept this.

We hear about displaced populations. There again, unfortunately, there are Canadian companies that are not living up to their responsibilities. They are guilty of some instances in which populations, and in particular aboriginal populations, have been displaced.

Government Orders

The government's answer, like the Liberals' answer, is that we have parallel agreements about the environment and labour. Those agreements, which have existed since NAFTA was signed, were included in the free trade agreements with Chile and Costa Rica. They are not in any way binding and they have not resulted in any significant improvements in labour rights or environmental rights, or more generally human rights. What is needed is for certain provisions to be incorporated into the free trade agreement or a future free trade agreement with Colombia. The benefits provided for in the agreement have to be linked to respect for the major international conventions of the International Labour Organization and the major environmental agreements, and respect for human rights.

All of this is missing from this treaty. I think this is largely a result of the government's indifference, the Conservatives' insensitivity to what human rights mean. When we consider that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister went out and said that if the Supreme Court decided that the Federal Court was correct and the Canadian government had to do everything necessary to repatriate young Omar Khadr, and I note again that he is a child soldier, arrested at the age of 15, who has been living in Guantanamo since that time, he was not sure that the government would abide by the decision of the Supreme Court. When we have reached the point that the Conservative government—because in this case, that is what we are talking about—is telling us in advance that it may not abide by a decision of the Supreme Court, we are in trouble.

This is not the only situation where the Conservatives are disregarding the rules. I am thinking, for example, of the current situation the Chief Electoral Officer finds himself in, where the Conservative Party, in response to the interpretation given by the Chief Electoral Officer, who is the arbitrator of the democratic rules when it comes to elections, has decided to bring action against him. The arbitrator is being sued. They do not agree with his decision, so they start legal proceedings. I am also thinking of the partisan appointments and the use of public funds for Conservative propaganda purposes.

I myself have seen in the riding of Rivière-du-Loup—Kamouraska—L'Islet—Montmagny—I said it backwards, but it is the same riding—tactics that it would not have been believed still existed in elections. There have been the phoney announcements by Conservative ministers and the use of resources in dubious fashions. I am thinking of the advertising both on the radio and in homes. And also, on election day, strangely, there was a message going around among Bloc Québécois sympathizers that created definite confusion.

I am not saying it is the Conservatives, but as Sherlock Holmes said, and I will conclude with this: "Who benefits from the crime?" Who benefits from the crime that took place in Rivière-du-Loup on November 9? I will leave the answer to the listener.

• (1125)

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague. It is true that there is a new Quebec sovereignist in the family. One day, a minister said that we had to have children, and that is exactly what we are doing.

I want to talk about Bill C-23. We hear more and more about fair globalization and human rights. Even President Obama is talking more and more about the right to democracy.

I have a question for my colleague. Why is this Reform-Conservative government, that keeps introducing law and order bills because it wants to protect victims, negotiating today an agreement with Colombia, with the same people it wants to put in jail?

Why does this government think that it is as pure as the driven snow when in fact it is not? Is it because profits are given precedence over human rights and the right to live? As the saying goes, out of sight, out of mind. In other words, as long as it is not in our backyard, there is no problem.

I would like my colleague to explain why these Reformists have a double standard.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. This gives me the opportunity to talk a little about the fundamental rights that are being violated in Colombia. If the Canadian government adopts an agreement like this, it will be an accomplice to the violation of human, labour, environmental and cultural rights.

We must not let ourselves be fooled. The people of Quebec and Canada are not fooled. The series of bills proposed by the Conservative government is part of its public relations and smoke and mirrors operation. If we dig a little deeper, we can see that most of these bills have to do with elements that already exist in the Criminal Code, or provide for amendments that would have no effect on crime prevention.

While the government is running this public relations operation, it is encouraging its members to vote in favour of measures to dismantle the Canadian firearms registry, a tool that police officers, stakeholders and criminologists have said is essential to crime prevention.

I remind members that three times, the Quebec National Assembly has voted unanimously in favour of a motion calling on the government to maintain the Canadian firearms registry in its entirety. The government's position is inconsistent, and we can see this inconsistency with the Colombian free trade agreement. The government talks a good talk, but in reality, what matters, what comes first are the major lobbies, like the environment lobbies for oil and mining, and some Canadian companies that operate in foreign countries. They are being given free rein, at the expense of what Canada has historically stood for.

I would like to conclude by talking about Kyoto. Canada signed the protocol, but the government reneged on the signature of Canada, of Canadians. I think that Canada's international reputation has gone out the window.

Government Orders

• (1130)

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I can understand the Conservative government supporting this agreement, but I really cannot understand the Liberal Party supporting this agreement, particularly because in 2008 the House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade recommended that no agreement be signed with Colombia until a human rights impact assessment had been done. It has not been done.

Why does the member think the Liberals are offside in supporting the government on this issue?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his question.

Personally, I think that the Liberals' approach is basically the same as the Conservatives', and that is a shame. If only some lessons had been learned from the shortcomings of the bilateral trade agreements Canada signed with developing countries a few years ago.

I feel that the government should have gone along with the committee's decision. I think that the Liberal members of the committee made the right decision. However, the party has regressed to where it was five or six years ago. I find that utterly deplorable. I hope that everyone here will recognize the fact that agreements signed in the past are just not good enough. We need to go forward with a new generation of free trade agreements.

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to put on the record a couple of points.

First of all, it is pretty clear to all hon. members, I am sure, that if private member's Bill C-300 were adopted by this House, it would provide the framework to indicate that businesses doing business abroad would have to fall within international guidelines for the protection of human rights and ethical standards for doing business. I wish that bill were in place right now because it would make this debate a lot easier for many people.

We are discussing this bill on the assumption that free trade will lead to greater influence over the human rights situation in Colombia. It is a hope. It is an assumption. It is not guaranteed, but it is a possibility in the right direction.

However, other countries are aware of the facts and are revoking their support for the Colombian regime. Recently the U.K. ended military aid to Colombia because of systemic crimes committed against Colombian people, so Canada is not sitting out there all alone and wrestling with how to deal with this. Certainly in the absence of human rights issues, the trade deal would have bilateral benefits. It is useful and if Canada were a player, that certainly would be helpful.

I referred earlier to the Amnesty International report of 2009 on the Americas. I would like to read into the record the section entitled "Insecurity". It says:

In Colombia, many of the human rights abuses committed in the internal armed conflict—including killings and enforced disappearances—are aimed at displacing civilian communities from areas of economic or strategic importance. Many indigenous communities live in regions rich in mineral and other resources on lands

legally and collectively owned by them. Such communities are often attacked in an effort to force them to flee so that the area can be opened up for large-scale economic development.

It elaborates on the point, but it argues strenuously about the reason a bill such as Bill C-300 is necessary, because these displacements are also a form of human rights abuse. We need to deal with that.

Finally, I wanted to add to the debate some extracts from an open letter from members of the House of Representatives from Bogota, Colombia to Canadian members of Parliament. They wanted us to know their opinion as the legislators. They said:

First of all, we would like to inform you that...[we are] responsible for exerting political control on the Government and the administration. It is also our duty to approve or not to approve the agreements the Government wishes to subscribe to with other States, by issuing a law.

As members of the national legislative entity and the representatives of the people of Colombia, we consider that the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and Colombia is a major factor in the establishment of stable, transparent scenarios for commerce and investment, which generate employment, allow for the improvement of living conditions of our citizens and block...paths to drug trafficking.

I think that is very powerful of the members of the House of Representatives of Colombia to give us their view. There is no simple solution to a problem when there are human rights abuses around the world. We could look at a number of countries, which I would argue would probably include China and others with whom we trade, with which we do not stop trying to advance trade opportunities.

We are not just Boy Scouts. We are a model to the world in terms of who we are and our values. The Colombian House of Representatives is reaching out to say they need to be more like Canada. They understand that. There needs to be commercialization and freer trade between our countries in order to protect and ensure the rights from a cooperative perspective. That means coming together.

In this letter, they also refer to the fact that this trade agreement includes a chapter on strengthening commercial capacities and essential elements to ensure that the benefits and opportunities given by this instrument and two parallel agreements to the development and evolution of a free trade agreement have been contemplated.

• (1135)

There is also an environmental cooperation agreement, which includes a commitment by the parties to sustainable development and mutual support in environmental practices in the formation of trade policies. There is a labour cooperation agreement which sets forth an effective inclusion of the fundamental rights of workers and international legislation of the parties.

Looking at this, I personally have been very concerned about the human rights situation in Colombia and whether or not there was something that we could constructively and affirmatively do. Asking for a human rights assessment on Colombia is asking for something that is obvious on its face. There are problems there. However, we have the tools in Bill C-300 to demonstrate the need for ethical conduct of Canadian businesses abroad. We also have the commitment of the House of Representatives from Colombia, that it understands these problems and it is not ignoring them.

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Yes, there are human rights abuses, but having assessed this on all bases and notwithstanding the fact that I continue to have a very strong concern about human rights abuses in Colombia and in other places around the world, I think the only affirmative action for Canada to take is to be there and to demonstrate how business can be conducted abroad on an ethical basis.

On that basis, I cannot have it both ways, but I believe we have to deal with this matter in a constructive and responsible fashion and be affirmative in what we believe we can bring to the table in terms of our relations with Colombia. Accordingly I have decided that I will be supporting the bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is clear that some members of the House are completely unaware of what is going on. One member just said that members of the Colombian Congress agree that a free trade agreement would help. How can anyone trust these people? How can any member come here and say that everything will be fine?

Most of the crimes are being committed by paramilitary groups. A number of human rights groups are worried about connections between the Colombian government and paramilitary groups. So many crimes go unpunished in Colombia as a matter of course that human rights groups believe there is collusion between Colombian politicians and paramilitary forces. At this very moment, more than 30 members of Congress are under arrest in Colombia.

How can a member tell us that we have to heed a cry for help from a member of Congress who wants a free trade agreement with Canada when 30% of them are under arrest? That makes no sense.

I would like to hear from the member who talked about the Congressman begging us to sign this agreement even though 30% of those people are in prison. He needs to come here and tell us why he is on their side.

• (1140)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, I have to accept the representations of the members of the House of Representatives at face value. In their letter to us they also said they consider approval of these agreements to be a step in the right direction to help us face the challenges that we face. They said that was to help us. They understand that this is an opportunity.

As well they go on to say that these instruments are entirely suitable to successfully face the ever-changing future. All countries face an ever-changing future, but the health and well-being of a nation cannot be legislated simply by not doing anything. We have to take steps. We have to take a risk.

There is a risk that this agreement will not do anything substantive to alleviate human rights abuses. However, we will be there, and we will be models to the Colombian people to show that we can have sustainable, fair and safe trade, and economic commercial activity with Colombia if we pass bills such as Bill C-300.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Vincent: Madam Speaker, I am not at all convinced of my colleague's credibility when he stands up for the Colombian

Congress. He should come and say that to one of my fellow citizens, Liana Pabon, whose father, mother and brother were killed in their house because they refused to move out.

This member is unable to understand that human rights are violated everywhere on the planet and especially in Colombia and that we denounce the fact that these people have no rights. How can one give any credence to the congress's claim that a free trade agreement will make things better? I do not believe that claim.

Therefore, it is important to understand that the government is willingly turning a blind eye. The only thing it wants to protect are the interests of mining companies.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, that is not the case. I have spoken previously, and in this debate as well. I am aware of the human rights abuses. I am aware of the position of Amnesty International. I am aware that the committee asked for an independent human rights assessment.

Making choices is not about having perfect information. Sometimes you need to decide which is the optimal option available. I have come to the conclusion that we have an opportunity to promote, encourage and work with Colombian people to address some of these human rights abuses in a small way.

I do not have to convince the member to change his vote. I am just telling him why I am voting the way I am.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, as the Bloc human rights critic, I am very pleased to speak today on a matter as important as the bill regarding free trade between Canada and Colombia.

This is not the first time that my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois and I have risen in this House to criticize the Conservative government's stubborn support for industry without regard for the rights of workers and with contempt, even, for human rights. We need think only of the employment insurance program, which, in recent years, has become a supplementary tax on employees and employers. Then there is Bill C-391 aimed at abolishing the requirement to register long guns with the Canadian gun registry, the failure of the mining companies to respect human rights when they are operating outside Canada, the failure to respect the rights of Omar Khadr and the matter of the return of Nathalie Morin and her children from Saudi Arabia. I must limit myself to these few examples, because the list is much too long and the time allowed me is much too short.

In a news release dated June 9, 2009, many Quebec and Canadian human rights organizations, including the Ligue des droits et libertés, expressed their indignation at the Canadian government's cynical commitment to human rights.

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The Conservative government has rejected totally or partially 29 of the 68 recommendations made to it by the members of the Human Rights Council, including the most significant ones. With this sort of behaviour, the Government of Canada has once again shown its complacency, indeed its disdain for its commitments under the various international treaties it has signed.

It is blatantly clear that social values are not among the Conservatives' priorities and even less among their concerns. However, supporting business is top priority in their ideology, while human rights and often the environment are treated with contempt.

Bill C-23, the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, is further proof of the sad reality of the Conservative government. Money to it is far more valuable than the fate of people. To sign such an agreement is also to support the social injustice in Colombia.

Why ratify such an agreement when they know full well that Colombia offers one of the poorest records in Latin America in terms of human rights? When he appeared before the Standing Committee on International Trade, Pascal Paradis, of Lawyers without Borders, said that the UN and the Organization of American States considered that the worst humanitarian crisis was still going on in Colombia.

Many human rights groups are concerned about the possible links between the Colombian government and the paramilitary organizations responsible for most of the violations. So many crimes go unpunished in Colombia as a matter of course that human rights groups believe there is collusion between Colombian politicians and paramilitary forces. The figures speak for themselves.

In 2008, crime by paramilitary groups increased by 41%, compared to 14% the previous year. The proportion of crimes committed by the government security forces rose by 9%, which is unacceptable. Despite the increase in crimes, impunity continues, with charges being laid only 3% of the time.

Over 30 members of congress are under arrest in Colombia, including members of the president's immediate family, and over 60 are currently under investigation regarding their links to the paramilitary.

The Conservatives always say that the human rights situation has greatly improved, but we need to be very careful. It is less catastrophic but still far from ideal.

● (1145)

Let me provide a few more figures. Since 1986, 2,690 trade unionists have been killed. If the number of murders of trade unionists declined somewhat after 2001, it has been increasing again since 2007. Some 39 trade unionists were murdered that year, followed by 46 in 2008, which is an 18% increase in just one year.

According to Mariano José Guerra, regional president of the National Federation of Public Sector Workers in Colombia, "thousands of people have disappeared and the persecution of unions continues".

It is hardly necessary to say that Colombia is one of the worst places on earth for workers' rights. Trade unionists are targeted for their activities. They are threatened, abducted and murdered.

On this side of the House—or rather in this part of the House because I am stunned to see the Liberals supporting an agreement like this—we cannot understand why the Conservatives are insisting, with Liberal support, on negotiating an agreement with Colombia when we know that trade unionists there are very often targeted with violence.

Another problem facing the people of Colombia is forced displacement. Although the Colombian government says there has been a 75% reduction in these internal displacements, other people contradict this figure. The U.S. State Department and Amnesty International say that more than 305,000 people were forcibly displaced in 2007. In 2008, more than 380,000 people had to flee their homes and workplaces because of the violence.

The Centre for Human Rights and the Displaced says that in 2008 there was a 25% increase in the number of forced displacements in Colombia. Since 1985, more than 4.6 million people have been forced to leave their homes and their land. I mention their land because the rights of Colombian farmers are also threatened. As someone who represents a riding that is largely dependent on agriculture, I am very worried about the situation.

In proportional terms, the number of displaced people is estimated at more than 7% of the entire population. Every day, 49 new families arrive in Bogota. Native people represent 4% of the population but more than 8% of the displaced.

When we look at these figures, it is hard not to be worried about the impact of a free trade agreement. More and more people are being displaced for economic reasons. Small subsistence farmers and small miners are forced off their land in favour of big agri-food or mining companies, a trend that would be considerably strengthened by this agreement. The situation is intolerable, especially when we know that in order to achieve their ends, the people responsible for these displacements use pressure tactics, threats, murder and the flooding of land.

We in the Bloc Québécois are not against trade, but it cannot be at any price. We should globalize in a way that is fair. In the trade agreements before us today, nothing significant has been done to include clauses regarding respect for international standards on labour law, human rights and environmental rights. We are left wondering whether the Conservative government is actually a lot more interested in investments than in anything related to human rights.

● (1150)

As my party's human rights critic, I am very concerned about the situation.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I had wanted to ask a question of the member for Mississauga South regarding the comments of the member for Kings—Hants on September 30. Nevertheless, I will ask the previous speaker the same question. On September 30, 2009, the member for Kings—Hants commented in regard to Colombia and said:

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To say that paramilitary forces are murdering union leaders today is false, because everybody who has been studying the issue recognizes that the paramilitary forces have been disbanded—

He based that assessment on, I believe, a four day visit to Colombia. However, this is totally inaccurate. A recent report from Amnesty International found that paramilitary groups remain active, despite claims by the government that all paramilitaries had been demobilized in a government-sponsored process that began in 2003. Paramilitaries continue to kill civilians and to commit other human rights violations, sometimes with the support or acquiescence of the security forces.

The question I have for the previous speaker is this. How did the member for Kings—Hants get it so wrong?

• (1155)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his excellent question.

Indeed, I mentioned in my speech some pretty alarming statistics about murders of trade unionists in Colombia.

Canada accepts a large number of Colombian refugees. People who are persecuted in Colombia seek political asylum in Canada.

Canada wants to sign a free trade agreement with a country, while accepting nationals fleeing persecution in that same country.

I think the government's actions in this matter are not coherent since it accepts Colombian nationals who are persecuted and whose lives are at risk in that country.

And yet we hear that this free trade agreement will allow the government and paramilitary groups to improve the situation of people living in Colombia. This rhetoric from the members opposite is totally illogical.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to join in the debate on the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement. At the outset, this debate has exposed a serious flaw in the government's approach to international trade.

I commend my NDP colleague from Burnaby in leading the opposition to the bill. I also thank the members of the Bloc Québécois for their continued support. I was very moved this morning when I heard the member from Laval speak eloquently and passionately about the situation in Colombia. She gave names and voices to those who have been murdered by a very oppressive regime. Through its support directly or indirectly of the paramilitary, that regime has caused the murder of thousands of civilians, many of them trade union activists. According to the International Labour Organization, over the last 10 years, 60% of all trade unionists murdered in the world were murdered in Colombia.

It is important to note that President Uribe has been accused by international human rights organizations of corruption, electoral fraud, complicity in extrajudicial killings by the army, of links to paramilitary and right-wing death squads, using his own security forces to spy on the supreme court of Colombia, opposition politicians, government politicians and journalists. Many govern-

ment members, including ministers and members of his family, have been forced to resign or have been arrested.

The regime has been recognized as a pariah by many countries in the world in terms of how it deals with its people and its failure to act in the interests of its citizens. Accordingly Canada, by entering into this agreement, is in fact acting to defend the approach of Mr. Uribe and his regime to government in Colombia.

We have heard it said by others, including the Liberal member for Kings—Hants, that this is a good deal because it would not only put an end to any possibilities of protectionism, but it would also lead to human rights advances. That statement cannot be supported. There is absolutely no precedent for a free trade agreement leading to changes and improvements in human rights. We need an agreement that ensures significant action is taken to reverse what is happening in Colombia and that the regime no longer supports the kind of activities going on there.

The NDP is not opposed to trade or to a regime which involves fair trade. We would support an agreement that fully respects human rights as a precondition for a trade deal. The Canada-Colombia agreement is fundamentally flawed for that reason and it does little more than pay lip service to the serious damage it could do to human rights in Colombia by legitimizing the dangerous regime that is implicated in violence and the murder of its citizens.

It has been suggested that once the Uribe government gets this free trade gift, the incentive to improve human rights will go out the window. There is no fundamental protection for human rights contained in this agreement. In fact, the violation of the side deal on labour rights can only result in a contribution being made of \$15 million to an international fund. That is clearly not a significant response to the desperate situation taking place in Colombia.

In addition to these serious and significant human rights violations, nearly 3,000 trade unionists have been murdered since 1986. This year alone, some 34 identified trade unionists have been murdered for their activities.

• (1200)

Colombia has nearly four million internally displaced persons, 60% of whom come from regions where there is mineral, agricultural or other economic activities. Private companies and their government and parliamentary supporters are forcing people from their homes. This economic development is being supported by the Colombian government and its trading partners. If Canada intends to act as a supporter of that regime, then we intend to do everything we can to stop it and we hope members of Parliament, who have listened to the debate, listened to their constituents, who have written them on this matter, listened to the Canadian Labour Congress and others, will change their mind and their approach toward this legislation.

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I want to mention some of the names, as my colleague from the Bloc Québécois did earlier, of individuals who have been killed in Colombia in the last few months: a teacher union activist of Arauca, Rodriguez Garavito, was murdered on June 9; Carbonell Pena Eduar, union of teachers and professors, was kidnapped from his workplace and murdered; a teacher with the association of teachers of Cordoba, Ramiro Israel Montes Palencia, was stopped on the road by two unidentified men and shot; and Cortes Lopez Zorayda, an activist in the teachers union, was murdered by two gunmen on a motorcycle on November 13 last week.

This violence against trade unionists and activists has continued on an ongoing basis, week after week, month after month, for many years, yet the Conservative government proposes to enter into a free trade agreement with the Colombia government and its regime. Our relationship with Colombia in the area of trade is not even significant. It is only our fifth largest trading partner in all of Latin America.

Why does the government see fit to enter into this relationship with Colombia, effectively supporting, ratifying and encouraging its activity toward its citizens? This is not the kind of Canada we want to see on the international stage. We want to see a Canada that vigorously promotes human rights. We do not want to see a Canada that helps countries that act this way toward their citizens. We do not want to see a Canada that fails to take any significant action to distance itself from this type of activity, which in fact, is being held by many international groups as being responsible for this.

It is a great shock to see the Conservative and Liberal Parties of Canada give support to the legislation, to the trade agreement and to the Colombian government, which acts so negatively against its citizens and tolerates and promotes directly and indirectly the kind of activities that we have talked and heard about in this debate.

This is a significant and important debate. We have submissions to the House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade on this arrangement from the Canadian Labour Congress, which has significant objections to the agreement. In its submission it states:

The Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement was not written to protect labour and human rights. It is more than a "trade" agreement. It is a trade and investment agreement underpinned by tacit Canadian support for a security agenda that defends the extractive industries, the drug cartels, and the internal security forces of Colombia.

That is a fairly strong and powerful statement coming from the representatives of all organized workers in Canada. It is not the right thing to do for Canada. It is not the right thing to do for Colombia. It is not the right thing to do for the global economy, which was what the Prime Minister unfortunately said.

• (1205)

There is a significant problem with this. The Government of Canada is tacitly supporting the government of Colombia. Its people live in fear because of the operations of paramilitaries and private security firms and the mafia-style gangland killings aimed at the people who are trying to change things and better their own lot and that of their fellow citizens. Trade union activists are the ones who do that.

That government, in defeating human rights activists and trade union activists, refer to them as terrorists. This is the latest word used

to blame somebody. The latest way to make it fair game for people to murder them, kill them, kidnap them and attack them is to pass a label on them when they are in fact trying to improve the lot of their fellow workers, citizens and the country in general.

I would be happy to entertain some questions and comments, but this agreement should be opposed and we certainly oppose it.

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was in the lobby doing some other work and I could not help but overhear some of the comments being made today, including from the member who just spoke. Everyone around the world recognizes the historical problems in countries like Colombia. A lot of what he has said is a diatribe to that.

Why does he feel that Canada, as a stable democracy, does not have a role to play in helping countries like Colombia into the 21st century? Our free trade agreements include labour and environmental standards, which are the cornerstone or ideology of that party. We are seeking to help them in doing that.

I know the president of Colombia was before the committee. He painted a different picture of the country. I doubt the member has been there to see that new picture, but I have. I had the great opportunity to be there for some time last year as we moved toward this. It is easy to snipe from the sidelines and read a lot of the gospel from before, but we are there to help them change.

Agriculture is a huge beneficiary of this type of free trade agreement. The Canadian Wheat Board wants this to happen, which is a paragon to the NDP. Therefore, why do those members constantly waste our time and stand in the road of this kind of progress?

• (1210)

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, we are clearly not talking about ancient history. We are talking about what has happened today, yesterday, the day before and last week.

Members of the Colombian labour movement are imploring Canadian parliamentarians to reject the agreement. They are the ones who know what is going on in their country. They are the ones who are telling us to not give succour to their government. They are telling us not to help it and legitimize its activity by supporting this agreement.

One would think, if this were good for the agricultural workers, industrial workers and the people of Colombia, members of the trade union of that country would be asking us to open it up. They would be asking us for more trade so they could get more jobs and improve their lot in life. However, that is not what they are saying. If they were, we would obviously be taking a very different approach.

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Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from St. John's East for pointing out and asking the obvious question. Why would we reward such bad behaviour toward environmentalists, trade unionists and anybody in the judicial system? It is open season on my colleagues in that Latin American country.

The labour organization ORIT, which is the plenary labour organization for the Organization of American States, has condemned Colombia. Yet it seeks to form this alliance with Canada in order to improve its image internationally, I believe.

My colleague points out some of the recent murders. They are not ancient history, but have taken place up to and including November 13, which is the most recent example, when a trade unionist was gunned down in the streets by two gunmen on motorcycles.

It is open season on the head of the carpenters union, the head of the teachers union and the head of the nurses union. Why would we do business with a country like that? When there is no compelling economic reason, what is driving the government to get in bed with such a corrupt regime and international pariah?

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, the question does not have an answer from me. Why, indeed, would the Conservative government of a proud democracy and whose history is foremost in support of human rights, both nationally and internationally, give encouragement to the Colombian government that has an appalling record of human rights and whose own people and representatives in the trade union movement, people working for human rights, are saying that this agreement is a bad thing and that it is rewarding the government for its atrocious record.

Why, indeed? I do not have an answer to that question and the answers that we are hearing from hon. members opposite do not hold water.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is a lively debate on the subject. As we see it, from the perspective we have on living conditions in Colombia, we can see that on the government's side, everything seems rosy in Colombia. We are discussing Bill C-23, whose purpose is to implement the free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia, and in particular we are debating the Bloc Québécois amendment, which has sparked considerable debate here in this House.

After our review of Bill C-23, it is our opinion that we must refuse to pass this bill at second reading. The government concluded this agreement while the Standing Committee on International Trade was considering the matter. The government thereby demonstrated its disrespect for democratic institutions.

This week, *Le Devoir* published a long article by Manon Cornéliier denouncing a crisis of democracy in Parliament. The article said that the committees are no longer held in high regard, that debates are ignored, neglected and scorned, and that Parliament is giving up on them. I could speak at length about this democratic deficit since the Conservatives have been in power.

We know very well that it is difficult to maintain a certain level of democracy and a certain respect for the opposition. But since the

Conservatives were elected, it has worsened. Committee work is no longer what it used to be. It has even made the work of parliamentarians worse.

While the committee was considering the agreement with Colombia, the government flouted the work of parliamentarians and democratic institutions. This is one of the reasons why we oppose this bill. If we are not capable of showing the world that we have a democratically elected Parliament and that opposing voices are being expressed, if the work of parliamentarians is ignored, how can anyone have confidence in the legislation we want to pass, especially when that legislation will have serious consequences for Colombia?

With the possible signing of a Canada-Colombia free trade agreement looming, the Standing Committee on International Trade considered the issue and actually went to Colombia for this purpose. It went to Colombia to meet there with representatives of government, civil society, unions, and human rights advocacy groups. This committee was supposed to produce a report containing recommendations for the government regarding the signing of a possible free trade agreement with Colombia.

Yet it was not even back from its trip when the government completed its negotiations with Colombia and was ready to sign an agreement. The committee produced a report all the same. Naturally the government took no account of its recommendations. Now even the Liberals are ducking out, despite the fact that they were in agreement with those recommendations. I say this because it was already difficult to maintain some respect for committee work, but this has become worse with the advent of the Conservatives.

A second reason raised by the Standing Committee on International Trade is at the very root of the Bloc Québécois' opposition to the signing of this agreement. It is important to note that our concerns are shared by many lobby groups, particularly human rights advocacy groups here in Canada and in Quebec, and also in Colombia. It would like to list a few of them. For example, here in Canada, there is Amnesty International, Development and Peace, the Canadian Council for International Cooperation and the Canadian Labour Congress. A number of unions have also come out against this agreement.

In Colombia, there are the national indigenous organization of Colombia, the popular women's organization, the national agrarian coordinator, the Christian movement for peace with justice and dignity, the national movement for health and social security, the Afro-American African roots movement, the Black Community Process, and COMOSOC, a coalition of Colombian organizations.

● (1215)

As is apparent, the committee heard several witnesses who enlightened it about this agreement and the fact that it raises a number of questions. For example, it would not allow for Colombians' living conditions to be improved if a Canadian investor were done out of profits.

It is understandable to want to implement measures to protect investments by Canadian or Quebec companies. But if an investment were threatened by government decisions that did not allow the company to make as much profit as it might hope, the company could then claim damages and have the matter heard by the courts.

Government Orders

As a result, according to the study the Bloc Québécois has done, this bill is very negative for Colombians' living conditions.

As well, Colombia is not one of Canada's leading trade partners. We wonder why the government wants to move ahead so quickly with this agreement. Imports were \$644 million in 2008, and exports amounted to \$704 million for the same year. Trade between the two countries is obviously very limited. We hear about wanting to protect investments and business transactions that take place between Colombia and Canadian investors, but the extent of the investments does not justify applying this clause in the case of Colombia.

A majority of these investments are in the mining sector and the extraction industry. It is important to consider that fact if we want to assess the importance of the investor protection clause in the free trade agreement between Colombia and Canada. The first aim is to make life easier for mining investors in Colombia. It has to be understood that it is common practice to incorporate an investor protection clause in a free trade agreement, and the Bloc agrees with that, to create a foreseeable environment for the investor so that it will not have its property seized or there will not be nationalization without compensation.

The Bloc Québécois is very aware that this is an issue for investors. But there has been some drift in this regard. As well, Canada incorporates an investor protection chapter in the free trade agreements it negotiates that is modelled on chapter 11 of NAFTA. What does chapter 11 of NAFTA provide? Foreign investors may themselves apply to the international tribunals, bypassing governments. The concept of expropriation is so broad that any law whose effect was to reduce an investor's profits may amount to an expropriation and result in legal action. The amount of the claim is not limited to the value of the investment, as I was saying earlier, it includes all potential profits in future, and in our opinion that is completely excessive. It means that if a law cut into a foreign investor's profits, the government of the country where the investments were made would be exposed to fantastically high claims.

The intention of the Conservative government regarding this agreement is clear here. Under the Liberals, incorporating an investor protection clause in free trade agreements modelled on the clause in chapter 11 of NAFTA had become common practice, and that is clearly a response to demands by multinationals. That is why I said just now that we thought the Liberals would support us and not agree with this, but clearly they are going back to their old habits and perhaps they are now ready to reconsider how they will be voting on this bill.

In Colombia, 47% of the population live below the poverty line, and 12% live in dire poverty. The unemployment rate is the highest in Latin America. Instead of putting on rose-coloured glasses as the Minister who spoke for the Conservative government was just doing, if we look at Colombians' living conditions, there is every reason to believe that this government does not care at all how the people there live and how we might improve their living conditions.

•(1220)

[English]

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of State (Sport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to put my comments on the record about the

reckless comments from the NDP and from some of the opposition members, but specifically the NDP members because they are not putting the facts out there.

I actually had an opportunity to speak with President Uribe a week and a half ago and he explained to me how important this would be for the Colombian people.

I will get to my question right now. The number of mass killings has decreased in the last four or five years from 680 to 127.

The hon. member just spoke specifically about the fact that extreme poverty in Colombia is at 12%. However, what she did not say is that it was at 21% before that government was elected. Colombia is making remarkable progress for the people of Colombia. A democratically elected government believes this will be good for the people of Colombia.

The reckless comments by the opposition and the comments from the NDP members, which are simply not true, are completely outrageous.

I would like the member to comment on the extreme conditions. Does she not agree that the government in Colombia has almost cut extreme poverty in half since it has taken office?

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, I think more rigorous and in-depth reading on events in Colombia is called for. I do not know whether the minister who has just spoken has met with other players currently in Colombia, where development is occurring on government land.

For example, how do they consider workers in Colombia? These people are underpaid, exploited and living in extreme conditions. I could perhaps send him some DVDs I have in my office, which express the anger, fear and fear of reprisals, often with a certain—I will not say it in the House, but I think the minister's arguments are very narrow when he says that to us.

For example, too much protection is afforded investors. This means that if a government wanted to give more benefits in order to protect its citizens—Colombians in this case—it could then be sued by Canadian or Quebec investors through the courts.

The government in my opinion is giving too much latitude to businesses, and many mining companies locating in different countries are ransacking and do not—

•(1225)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. member for Repentigny.

Mr. Nicolas Dufour (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened with considerable interest to my colleague's remarks. I have a very simple question for her.

In 2008, the committee responsible for international trade conducted a study costing several tens of thousands of dollars. The members went to Colombia to study what was going on there, in greater depth. The committee submitted a report, but the Conservatives ignored it.

Government Orders

As we have said from the outset, the Bloc has no problem with free trade as such. Our problem is with the way it is done and the rules and framework.

When I see that the Conservatives do not even take the time to look at a committee report, I think they are ridiculing democracy and the work we do. I would like to hear what my colleague has to say.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Québec with a short response, please.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, the government operates in an undemocratic manner. As to the work of the committee, they went to Colombia and they met not only the president and people in the government, but they also met a number of groups, which I mentioned earlier, and had recommendations.

The government did not even wait until they came home. It had already decided. Its bed was made. As I pointed out earlier, this week's *Le Devoir* reports that democracy is in crisis. That says a lot on how people see the work of parliamentarians.

I have sat in this House since 1993 and I find that, compared with what the committees do, the Conservatives are far below people's expectations of what living in a democracy might be. They have no time for the opposition.

In representing the public in our riding as elected officials, we also represent certain values and political beliefs. People want their values and ideas defended in this Parliament, but this government does not care what the opposition thinks.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to add my comments to the debate on Bill C-23, Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act, now before the House. I am pleased to also express my opposition to this legislation, primarily because of human rights issues, as we have been stressing over the past few weeks.

As with everything else, before making a decision it is important to weigh the pros and the cons, to hear the arguments on both sides, and then to take into consideration the fine distinctions that are overlooked in the basic arguments. It is not out of ideological stubbornness that the Bloc Québécois is opposed to this bill. I know the Bloc critic on international trade quite well. He is a serious person who would not let his parliamentary duty be tainted or marred by restrictive ideological straitjackets. So, I can say with certainty that our party's position on the legislation before us today has much more to do with a careful review than with irrational stubbornness, contrary to what some parliamentarians suggested during their usual display of petty partisanship.

One has to be very shortsighted to not realize that our position is shared by a large number of organizations, including unions, workers advocacy groups and human rights groups, both in Canada and in Colombia. "We are not alone", as Michèle Lalonde says in her poem. There are many who, like us, think that supporting Bill C-23 would be "shooting ourselves in the foot", this for a number of reasons.

Indeed, to agree with this legislation is to condone serious and even very serious human rights violations affecting social, economic and even fundamental rights. There are many examples of that.

For instance, it is estimated that, since 1986, close to 2,700 trade unionists have been killed. In 2007 alone, 38 were assassinated because of their commitment.

According to France's national institute for demographic studies, in the year 2000, Colombia had by far the highest violent death rate in the world, with 60.8 violent deaths per 100,000 population. This was far more than Russia, which came in second with a rate of 28.4 homicides per 100,000.

By comparison, Canada had a rate of 1.78 per 100,000 for that same year. So, we are talking about a rate that is 34 times higher than that of Canada.

To claim that a treaty can improve humanitarian conditions is to delude oneself. It is the contrary that should occur. Indeed, the improvement of the social conditions should be a prerequisite to signing a free trade treaty.

Canada does not have to be a global cop enforcing what is morally right, but it has a duty to refuse to condone things that happen elsewhere, but that would not be tolerated here. It is because of this same principle that we cannot accept the unconditional transfer of Afghan prisoners, without any guarantee that they will not be mistreated. Otherwise, we are more or less part of a subcontracting process involving basic right violations, whereby the government shirks its responsibilities on the pretext that these violations are not occurring on its territory. The government should know that moral obligations do not stop at the border.

Beyond the humanitarian dimension of the situation in Colombia, and regardless of the good and not so good reasons that should make us accept or reject this bill, there is one aspect that remains profoundly unacceptable, namely the utter contempt for democratic institutions shown by the Conservative government in signing the free trade agreement, without even waiting for the committee's report.

That adds another string to the bow of Conservative hypocrisy. Was it not the Prime Minister himself who used to castigate Paul Martin's Liberals for running roughshod over the will of Parliament? Did he not proclaim loud and long that, if elected, he would make it a point of honour never to disregard the will of the House?

Obviously these were hollow words that soon yielded to actions that speak a lot more loudly and show the true face of the government, which cannot accept its minority status.

● (1230)

So even if we had agreed with the spirit of this bill, which we do not, we would have been forced to object to the way it was handled in actual fact.

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This made the front page of last Saturday's *Le Devoir*, as my colleague mentioned, and I quote: "Democracy in crisis". In this devastating article, the excellent journalist Manon Cormellier writes the following in her introduction: "Stephen Harper rules: his ministers play second fiddle, committees have fallen out of favour, and debates are ignored. Neglected, held in contempt, Parliament is in deep trouble". She goes on to quote Peter Russell, an emeritus professor at the University of Toronto who could hardly be described as a nasty separatist. He is unequivocal, though, saying that the Prime Minister does not take the House of Commons seriously as a forum of national public debate, which only encourages the further marginalization of Parliament.

There are numerous examples: the manuals given to committee chairs on techniques for slowing and sabotaging the work when things are not going the Conservatives' way; their contempt for private member's bills, even if the bills pass all stages of the legislative process; their refusal to give royal recommendation to these bills; the use of public funds for partisan purposes; and the constant appeals of decisions made by Canadian courts. I could go on forever.

Yet this same government constantly urges the opposition to cooperate with it. They must have a very peculiar idea of cooperation to think they were encouraging it by short-circuiting the work of a committee.

What message does an attitude like that send to parliamentarians? Basically, their work is useless and the government could not care less about the conclusions they reach and the recommendations they make. In other words, no salvation outside the government, or should I say, outside the Prime Minister's Office.

Passing this bill, agreeing to this treaty, would amount to approving, condoning, confirming, ratifying and assenting to a way of doing things, a view of parliamentary government that is so restrictive it poses a real threat to the democratic values of Quebecers.

The end never justifies the means.

This reminds me of another flagrant example of the government's inability to listen to either parliamentarians or the courts of the land, namely, the case of young Omar Khadr. I think there is a parallel here with a case whose historical importance should give us pause. I am thinking of what in France is called the Dreyfus affair.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I would like to quickly remind the members what happened.

Alfred Dreyfus, a captain in the French army of Alsatian Jewish descent, was at the heart of a very important political and social scandal in the late 19th century. He stood accused of the most serious crime an officer could face, namely, high treason, after a note was found that gave details regarding the location of French troops during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. He was quickly tried and convicted, but later appealed that ruling, knowing he had been the victim of a legal conspiracy. In fact, as history has shown, he was innocent. There was compelling evidence to support his theory that it was a conspiracy. Clearly, France wanted to make someone pay, to find a scapegoat for the French fiasco. A guilty party had to be found.

Thus, in seeking some form of justice, the French government was willing to convict an innocent man, someone it knew to be innocent.

One of the most outspoken individuals in this affair was certainly Charles Péguy, an author who is largely unknown today, but whose body of work was enormous. In *Notre jeunesse*, he wrote the following about the Dreyfus affair and what he considered a crime committed against him:

—that a single injustice, a single crime, a single illegality, particularly if it is officially recorded, confirmed, a single wrong to humanity, a single wrong to justice and to right, particularly if it is universally, legally, nationally, commodiously accepted, that a single crime shatters and is sufficient to shatter the whole social pact, the whole social contract, that a single legal crime, a single dishonourable act will bring about the loss of one's honour, the dishonour of a whole people.

I could go on. Ten minutes go by very quickly in the House. I will move on to my conclusion, for I believe I have made my point.

The way in which Bill C-23 was brought forward is another example of how this government tends to undermine the House. So people will understand why the Bloc Québécois could never vote in favour of Bill C-23, the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act.

• (1235)

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we have become accustomed to seeing the Conservative government show a total lack of respect for democratic institutions: sabotage of committee work on orders from the PMO, obsessive control of information to the point of restricting access to it, and refusal to implement resolutions passed by the House of Commons. In the case of the free trade agreement with Colombia, the government took contempt to a whole new level. It conducted broad consultations and even went to Colombia.

But the government decided to enter into this agreement before the committee had even completed its work. Its message to parliamentarians is that no matter what they think or say, it will do as it pleases. And we see that today. It is saying the same thing to the many witnesses who came to share with us their comments on this agreement. We cannot condone such contempt and such stubbornness.

How can we trust the Conservative government to ensure respect for human rights in Colombia when it has no respect for our democratic institutions?

I would like my colleague from Saint-Lambert to comment on that.

• (1240)

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Mr. Speaker, I was precisely asking in my speech how this government could respect human rights in Colombia when democracy is not even respected in this House. The parliamentary committee tabled its report, but it was not taken into consideration before the agreement was signed.

I take this opportunity to answer the question asked by my colleague opposite a few moments ago. He said that the poverty rate has gone down in Colombia.

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When signing such free trade agreements with other countries, we must first ensure that the economy of these other countries is similar to ours. That is hardly the case with Colombia. Human rights should therefore be much more important than the economy and investments between our two countries.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question on poverty for my colleague. I enjoyed her speech, but she did not really have enough time to speak to poverty or respond to the member opposite who spoke of reducing poverty in Colombia.

When we only meet with representatives of the Colombian government and those who can cook the books—it is as simple as that—can we truly talk about reducing poverty in Colombia? The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has the real figures: 68% of the population in rural Colombia live below the poverty line. Of that number, at least 11% were poorer still and were even struggling to feed themselves.

Can we sign a free trade agreement with a country that has absolutely no respect for its population or its workers and certainly has no real concern for reducing poverty?

Mrs. Josée Beaudin: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. I want to thank my colleague.

Although the poverty rate in Colombia has gone down over the past few years, it is still one of the highest in Latin America. This is one of the poorest countries in Latin America. We cannot sign free trade agreements with this country to make life easier for investors. On the contrary, Canada has to retain its ability to exert pressure on this country to respect the human rights of its citizens.

I would like to draw a parallel with the child poverty situation in Canada, since I am a member of the committee that deals with that issue. In the past 10 years, we have not in any way achieved the goal that was set for reducing child poverty. Other goals will be set for 2020 or 2025. If Canada cannot manage to come up with the necessary measures to reduce child poverty here, then I imagine that poverty in other countries is way over its head.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to speak to Bill C-23, which the Conservatives would use to force Canada, if they have their way, to enter into a free trade agreement with Colombia.

A number of speakers before me have clearly shown that, unlike most international trade agreements, this agreement does not acknowledge the importance of enforcing respect for human rights.

The Conservatives have managed to convince themselves that by signing a free trade agreement with Colombia, we would miraculously be creating a new set of conditions that would have Colombia respect human rights from this point forward.

That is just not the case. Even the Americans, who the Conservatives emulate in international matters, are saying that they will never, ever sign a free trade agreement with the current Colombian government for the simple reason that they recognize, as we in the NDP do, that, unfortunately for its inhabitants, that country does not respect basic rights and the right to free association and union rights, in particular. Hundreds of union members and leaders

have been murdered without any apparent consequence in that society, and this is but one of many examples.

Out of the ruins of the second world war, pioneers like Jean Monnet, Konrad Adenauer and Robert Schuman achieved one of the greatest successes in the history of the world when they took countries that had been at war for centuries, if not millennia, and built what is now the European Union. But you have to walk before you can run. They at least had a common foundation in their desire to respect human rights. It started with an agreement covering coal and steel, which became a common market, then an economic community, before turning into the true union we know today. But this is a union that continues to respect human rights, because that was one of the values on which it was built.

There is no similarity here. We are talking about a country that the Conservatives would like to see improve its human rights record, but that is not happening.

Moreover, I have news for the Conservative chief government whip, who decided a few weeks ago to give us a lesson in morality when he said that he was apparently offended because the opposition was daring to play its role as the opposition. He gave us a finger-wagging lesson in morality, saying that that is not how to make Parliament work. If I understood the Conservative Party's chief whip correctly, making Parliament work means giving the Conservatives everything they want. That is not how things work in a democracy, but it speaks volumes about this government's attitude and why the Conservatives do not see any problem in proposing a free trade agreement with Colombia, something the Americans would never do.

In fact, by debating the amendments and subamendments to Bill C-23, we are complying fully with the rules of our parliamentary institutions. We will not be lectured on morality by a government that is trying to force passage of a bill that would mean signing a free trade agreement with a country that does not respect human rights.

We will not stand for that. They can carry on admonishing us and telling us how dissatisfied they are with the results, but they are in the minority. There is an important lesson in this for anyone who might be thinking of making a change for the worse if they ever win a majority. The consequences of that are clear in the wording of Bill C-23. This bill belies the Conservatives' ideals: even if a country does not respect human rights, as long as business is good, nothing else matters.

All of the Conservatives' empty words about respecting human rights can now be examined and understood in light of what we have before us today.

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•(1245)

The emperor has no clothes. This government talks about respecting human rights, but what it really wants is a free trade agreement with a country that systematically denies people their basic human rights.

The New Democratic Party believes that we must begin by strengthening the ability to enforce respect for human rights within Colombia. If asked, we should not hesitate to use our democratic institutions' experience to help Colombia.

But if we sign this agreement now, we will be sending the Government of Colombia the message that it does not need to make an effort to improve its human rights record because we are prepared to sign an agreement with the current Colombian government.

We must avoid sending that message at all costs. If Canada is serious and wants to become a champion of democratic values once again, we must stand up and say that an agreement like this one with a country that does not respect human rights will never make it through this Parliament.

•(1250)

[*English*]

One of the things that was the most surprising in this debate with regard to this proposed free trade treaty with Colombia was to hear the whip of the Conservatives, index finger wagging under our noses, telling us that we did not understand democracy because democracy was giving the government what it wanted. He said that we were not making Parliament work because we were not giving the government the free trade deal that it wanted with a government that does not respect human rights in Colombia. I have news for him. We are respecting every single rule of our Parliament and the institution that it represents in our democracy.

What we are saying is that it is wrong to sign a free trade deal with a government that does not respect human rights. We are going to use our ability as a major player in Parliament to do something that the Liberals do not do, which is to stand up for human rights, to stand up for democracy, and to stand up for principle.

I have a series of letters from groups around the country complaining that the Liberals are not doing what they claim to do, which is to stand up for human rights. It is a good thing that the NDP and other members of the House have stood and used their voices to say yes to greater relations with all countries, yes to using our parliamentary institutions, our experience and our human rights record to help people build capacity to respect human rights, and no to a free trade deal that sends the wrong signal.

It sends the signal that there are no problems in Colombia, that the murder of hundreds of trade unionists is something we would accept, whereas it is completely unacceptable based on all international principles and understanding of human rights, and democratic values around the world.

Shame on the Conservatives, those great givers of lessons before the eternal, those great finger wagers with regard to everyone else's behaviour. Shame on them for proposing a free trade deal rather than requiring that an effort be made in Colombia to bring up its standards

of human rights, its respect for people, and its respect for social rights. That is a major difference between Colombia and us.

Shame on the pathetic Liberals, as usual talking out of both sides of their mouths at the same time, daring to say that they want to have Canada once again become a voice in the world. They are pathetic. All the correspondence in this file shows that the groups that once supported the Liberal Party now realize that there is only one strong principled voice for human rights in the House and that is the New Democratic Party of Canada.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was an interesting rant. I will try to counter that with some facts.

The reality is that the free trade agreement with Colombia has human rights and environmental provisions. It is a good agreement for human rights and the environment in Colombia. We have listened to the hyperbole that has continued to erupt over this agreement. We have had over 80 hours of debate in the House already and it is ongoing.

I will provide a couple of facts. Between 2002 and 2008 the number of mass killings decreased by 81% in Colombia, homicide rates have dropped by 44%, kidnappings are down 87%, extreme poverty has fallen from 21% to 12%, 32,000 paramilitaries have been demobilized, and the list goes on and on.

The question I have for the hon. member is this. We are already trading with Colombia without rules. We already have a co-operative trading agreement. We do not have a free trade agreement, so our industry is being penalized for trading with Colombia. Since we are already trading with Colombia, would it not make sense to put rules in place?

•(1255)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, since 1990, 2,690 trade unionists have been murdered in Colombia.

Colombia does not want just to have trade with Canada, all countries do with very few exceptions, it wants a privileged trade agreement with Canada. We should only put our name on privileged trade agreements with countries that respect human rights, and that is not the case in Colombia.

These great givers of lessons about law and order, they are dealing with a narco state and then they are going to stand up here in the House and say that they are standing up for law and order. Why do they not try standing up for law and order internationally? Then we will start believing them.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives would have us believe that it is now okay to trade with Colombia and give it this special status, most favoured nation status with a trade deal because it is murdering trade unionists at a lesser rate. I heard the Minister of Agriculture saying that it would be good for agriculture, et cetera. Well, it is the very trade union leaders of the farm workers in Colombia who are being slaughtered this month. We are not talking about last year.

November 1, the head of the ACA union of farm workers of Arauca, Paulo Suarez, was murdered in his home, gunned down by gunmen in front of his family.

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Then on November 5, Raoul Medina Diaz, also with the union of farm workers, was also gunned down and murdered.

On November 13, just a couple of days ago, Cortes Lopez Zorayda, member of the union of teachers and union activist, was murdered by two gunmen on a motorcycle.

It is happening as we speak. How in all good conscience can a country like Canada see fit to do business with an international pariah that is gunning down every barrier to its trade ambitions without any recognition of human rights? I would like my colleague to comment.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, it is precisely because of facts like that, that have taken place within the last couple of weeks, that the Americans would never sign this type of free trade agreement with the current Colombian government.

What my colleague from Winnipeg Centre just said is precisely true. Canada should stand up and say, "We will help you. We will teach you. We will help you build capacity. But we will not put our signature on a privileged trade deal which by implication means that we accept what is happening in Colombia, when based on all of our traditions here in Canada, our respect for democracy, our respect for human rights, we cannot in good conscience sign this type of trade deal with that regime".

Help the Colombians to learn. Give them examples of what institutions will work. Help them develop respect for human rights. Then we will see. Right now, that government, historical error. That is why we are going to use every means in this House under our institutions and the respect thereof to prevent this trade deal from going through.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-23, Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act.

First of all, the Bloc Québécois will be voting against this bill, because it is an insult to human rights. The Conservative Party should be ashamed of itself for coming up with this bill, for trying to make us believe that it will create jobs in Colombia, when what it will actually do is help drug traffickers, many of whom are in power, to make money on the backs of workers. It is shameful. We are here in the House today to remind those people who claim to be "tough on crime" that they simply want to do business with a government that does nothing less than allow paramilitary groups to kill its own citizens, unionized workers and people who work in the mines in order to line the pockets of the criminals who run the government. It is scandalous.

The Canadian government's main motivation for entering into this free trade deal is not trade, but rather investments. Given that this agreement contains a chapter on investment protection, it will make life easier for Canadians investing in Colombia, especially in mining. What does that mean? In 1995, a Canadian corporation, Colombia Goldfields, signed a mining contract with a rich Colombian local family to extract gold from a mine that until then had been artisanally mined by the inhabitants of the Rio Viejo region. At the same time, paramilitary forces killed 400 people and displaced over 30,000 people from that region. That was to make money on the

backs of workers. They did so by taking up arms to kill people and force 30,000 citizens out of that region. All that to allow a Canadian company to make money. That money is tainted by the blood of those people. Is that what we want to pass here in the House? It is scandalous. We must not sign such an agreement.

Judging by all the investment protection agreements Canada has signed over the years, the one that would bind Canada and Colombia is ill conceived. All these agreements contain clauses that enable foreign investors to sue a foreign government if it takes measures that reduce the return on their investment. Such clauses are especially dangerous in a country where labour and environmental protection laws are uncertain at best. By protecting a Canadian investor against any improvement in living conditions in Colombia, such an agreement could delay social and environmental progress in that country, where the need for progress is great.

Colombia's human rights record is one of the worst in the world. With the conclusion of this free trade agreement, Canada would deprive itself of the ability to exert pressure on the Colombian government to improve its human rights record.

The Conservative government keeps telling us that it is combining the free trade agreement with a side agreement on labour and another on the environment. Such agreements are notoriously ineffective. They are not part of the free trade agreement and so investors could destroy the rich Colombian environment with impunity, move communities to make it easier for themselves to establish their mines and continue to assassinate trade unionists.

As for the free trade agreement itself, the Bloc Québécois is not prepared to trade the ability of the government to exert pressure to promote respect for human rights for the ability of Canadian companies to invest abroad, companies that would make money at the cost of Colombian lives. That is absolutely disgusting.

• (1300)

The Bloc Québécois and the NDP have very good reasons to oppose this bill. In Canada, not only the opposition is against this bill, but the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, Amnesty International, the FTQ, Development and Peace, KAIROS, the Public Service Alliance of Canada, Lawyers Without Borders, the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, and the National Union of Public and General Employees.

In Colombia, the coalition of social movements and organizations of Colombia includes the national indigenous organization of Colombia, the popular women's organization, the national agrarian coordinator, the Christian movement for peace with justice and dignity, the national movement for health and social security, the Afro-American African roots movement and the black community process. All these organizations are opposed to this totally unacceptable agreement.

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Colombia has one of the worst human rights records in Latin America. Listen to this. The crime statistics point to a very sinister side of Colombia. In 2008, the crimes committed by paramilitary groups increased by 41%, in comparison with 14% the previous year. There was a 9% increase in the proportion of crimes committed by government security forces. Even though the number of crimes is rising, the perpetrators remain as immune as ever. Only 3% of crimes end in a conviction.

Canada is going to invest in this country on the pretext that it will help the economy. That is not true. If this agreement is signed, Canada will help the rich get richer by crushing the people. People in the middle ages were respected more than people today are by this political party, which is bent on disgracing Canada. No government on earth can accept this sort of situation, especially since our country is supposed to be democratic. A democracy has principles of law. I hope that these people will listen to reason. They will if they have a conscience. Mr. Speaker, I know that you have a conscience and that you will talk some sense into these people.

Since 1986, 2,690 trade unionists have been murdered in Colombia. Though the number of murdered trade unionists dropped somewhat after 2001, it has risen again since 2007, when 39 trade unionists were murdered. In 2008, the number jumped to 46, an 18% increase in one year. They are murdering trade unionists, people who defend workers. Who is doing the murdering? Colombian paramilitaries are, with support from the state.

And now the Colombian state has suddenly become angelic? We are not fooled. These people only have money in their hearts and on their minds. They have no respect for their fellow Colombians or for human rights. What is more, they have no respect for Quebeckers and Canadians who do not accept this way of thinking. At the risk of repeating myself, this is totally unacceptable.

According to Mariano José Guerra, regional president of the Colombian trade union federation, thousands of people have disappeared and unions continue to be persecuted.

For these and many other reasons, we have to vote against Bill C-23.

• (1305)

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the member's speech, which was quite active and lively to say the least, but very important. For a number of months we have been leading the charge together to bring awareness to this ill-thought-out deal.

I want to focus on one element which I think is really important. We already have trade with Colombia. We will always have some trade with Colombia, just like other nations. However, we are talking about engaging in a privileged trading relationship. That is what this is about.

The Conservatives continually talk about how they are tough on crime. They are very serious about that and they have flooded the justice committee with a number of bills. Ironically, the committee cannot get through all the bills. At the same time, the Conservatives want to enter into a privileged trading relationship with a narco-state which has a murderous record with respect to trade unionists and

which also has a drug economy. Why would the Conservatives want to engage in this type of a privileged relationship with that country?

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from the New Democratic Party for his question.

He is absolutely right. The answer is not necessarily in the question, but there are certainly some troubling indicators. The Conservative Party of Canada, the product of the merger between the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, is a party that has always said it wants to be squeaky clean. It is a party that has always approached politics as though preaching, that calls itself a down-to-earth, grassroots party, and that projects an aura of saintliness that calls to mind a full array of religious regalia. This party is trying to tell us, the elected representatives of Quebeckers and Canadians, that their approach to an agreement with Colombia is right when, in fact, they want to do business with a country that promotes the sale of illegal drugs and is known around the world as a narco-state. This is totally unacceptable.

• (1310)

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Gatineau for his arguments in support of the Colombian people and against this bill. His words clearly evoke the misfortune awaiting the Colombian people should Colombian companies be given the latitude that this free trade agreement would afford.

My question is the following. Does my colleague understand the Liberals' position? When they were in power and under NAFTA, chapter 11 gave the latitude that is included in the Colombian agreement. They had to backpedal on that point and today they are going to support the Conservatives in their attempt to give more latitude to companies that will exploit the Colombian people. Can he elaborate on that? Does he understand their position?

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my Bloc colleague from Chambly—Borduas for his question.

We should not be surprised and I am certain there will be agreement on this: when in power, and although they are two different parties, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party have the same outlook. These parties do not think in terms of human rights. They think about making rich Canadian mining companies that establish themselves in developing or emerging countries even richer. Why will they go to these countries? Crudely put, to exploit the local people and have their friends pocket the profits. It is scandalous, unacceptable and even anti-democratic.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to once again congratulate my colleague from Gatineau on his argument, and in particular for the work he does every day for the citizens of his riding, which he represents not only with brilliance but also with great effectiveness.

I want to continue along the line raised by my colleague, with some statistical illustrations.

The U.S. State Department and Amnesty International say that 350,000 more people were displaced in Colombia in 2007.

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In 2008, over 380,000 persons had to flee their homes and workplaces because of violence. According to the Centre for Human Rights, in 2008 there was a 25% increase in the number of population displacements, and 2008 was the worst year since 2002 for population displacements.

Since 1985, nearly 4.6 million persons have been forced to leave their homes and their land. It has been estimated that 7% of the Colombian population has been displaced. Every day 49 families arrive in Bogota, the capital of Colombia, after being forced to leave their land. Indigenous people account for half of the Colombian population thus displaced. In fact, 8% of the total population has been displaced, and 4% are indigenous. These figures are very revealing.

These people are displaced because they have been evicted from their land by land exploiters, big landowners and property and mining conglomerates.

The latter do their work through pressure, threats and murder. They flood the land. When the people are forced to move, they have to take shelter in the cities, and shantytowns grow up. I have been to Bogota, Colombia. Right downtown there is a mountain of cardboard houses. Every day 49 families arrive in these places. The living conditions of these people are quite unimaginable. They used to have a small landholding, their own space to grow crops to feed their family, but they were uprooted from that land. In fact companies, including Canadian companies, have the right to expropriate the people.

The agreement that is before us confirms and upholds the rules of the marketplace that cause people to be exploited.

As my colleague from Gatineau said earlier, this is outright theft, and it is part of a state system. These people are forced, by the paramilitary and all the resulting abuse, to abandon their land. This creates poverty, unemployment, crime, truancy, water shortages, power shortages, etc. The city of which I speak is a shantytown at that central mountain in downtown Bogota. There is no electricity. When there is electricity it is thanks to extension cords. The people go to get electricity at the bottom of the mountain, and quite often the cords are unplugged. When the rains come, the mountain is washed out and often people lose their homes. These are houses made of cardboard or bits of wood.

You have to see this poverty to realize the extent of it. The government is aware that it exists. The Liberal Party is aware that it exists.

• (1315)

A committee went there, to Colombia, and was to report to this House to give the government an opinion before it introduced its bill. However, the government did not care about that and did not even wait for the report from the committee that went to witness the situation before introducing its bill. This situation is completely unacceptable for Colombians, but it is also unacceptable in terms of the democratic process in this House.

First, the opposition is against it and the party that forms the official opposition has not even bothered to do its job as the official opposition. A majority of the public has given the opposition a mandate to prevent acts like those that are currently being

committed, in terms of legislation. The Liberals did not even bother to do their job as opposition with the mandate they received, with us, from the public, which is precisely to keep watch on this government. The public did not have enough confidence in this government and gave the opposition a majority so it would act vigilantly to protect us and protect the peoples with whom we do business.

It is quite scandalous to see how the Liberals are behaving in this matter and it also violates a tradition, now becoming somewhat remote, in the time of Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson. Because of his humanitarian positions, for example, for peace and humanity, he received a Nobel Prize. We are a long way from that. This is quite shameful. They have tarnished the reputation of those people, whose conduct in relation to human rights was exemplary, even if they did not have the same political allegiance as us. In that respect, I would say that the conduct of the present Liberal Party regarding this bill is quite shameful.

In terms of protecting the rights of workers, which my colleague has spoken about, since 1986, 2,686 trade unionists have been killed. As I said a moment ago, I went to Colombia twice, in 1974 and 1976, on cooperation missions, to establish food, agricultural and housing cooperatives. So I have had an opportunity to work with those people. At the time, in 1974 and 1976, I found the situation to be abominable and I thought that the situation had improved today.

The more I have thought about this in the last few months, the more I have realized that not only has the situation not improved, the violations of human rights have been refined. Often, they are less visible and they give people like the Conservatives and Liberals pretexts for claiming the situation has improved. Well, the situation has not improved, and we have the statistics to show that 2,686 trade unionists are dead. As soon as trade unionists start making demands, they are in trouble. There were still murders in 2007. There were 39 murders of trade unionists, an increase of 18% in one year.

I could continue like this, but I am told I have only one minute left. My colleagues are certainly going to ask me questions and so I will be able to fill in a bit more. The Bloc Québécois will definitely not approve a bill like this. Bill C-23 is unworthy of being voted on by a Chamber such as ours and we are not playing that game. We have too much self-respect to do that and we have too much respect for the people who voted for us to do that.

• (1320)

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on September 30, the member for Kings—Hants, representing the Liberal Party, made the following comment:

To say that paramilitary forces are murdering union leaders today is false, because everybody who has been studying the issue recognizes that the paramilitary forces have been disbanded....

That is what he said after having been in Colombia for four days.

According to a recent report from Amnesty International, it found that paramilitary groups remain active, despite claims by the government that all paramilitaries had demobilized in a government sponsored process that began in 2003, and that paramilitaries continue to kill civilians and commit other human rights violations, sometimes with the support or acquiescence of the security forces.

Government Orders

How does the member think the member for Kings—Hants came up with that conclusion?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Speaker, when someone wants to make an unacceptable position sound legitimate, they deny the facts. The member he quotes is denying the fact that trade unionists are still being killed because he wants to support what the Conservatives are saying.

In 2007, there were 39 murders of trade unionists by the paramilitaries, and in 2008 there were 46. That is very recent. There is nothing more stubborn and immutable than a fact. The facts show that 2,690 trade unionists have been killed in 23 years. Since the beginning of this decade, there have been 40 murders a year. That is the answer and that is what they are doing.

• (1325)

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, earlier, a Liberal member who supports this bill said that the Colombian House of Representatives wanted us to sign this agreement because it would further protect human rights.

We know that 30 members of congress have been arrested in Colombia, including members of the president's immediate family. Furthermore, 60% of them are under investigation.

Why imply that this agreement will further protect human rights when we know what is actually going on? I would like to know what my colleague thinks.

Mr. Yves Lessard: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Once again, the government is trying to deny a reality that cannot be ignored.

The member for Gatineau and I described the situation with the help of statistics from large conglomerates. The agreement between Canada and Colombia, Bill C-23, would legitimize something unacceptable: a company can expropriate an owner if the company wants his land. What is more, if the country's laws prohibit this expropriation, the company can sue the country for preventing him from investing and making a profit. That is totally absurd. This would let companies take power away from the government in terms of the management of land and natural resources. That makes no sense. That is what the Conservatives want to do, with the help of the Liberals. That is unacceptable.

The Bloc Québécois will do everything in its power to prevent these unbelievable economic crimes and human rights violations that are awaiting the people of Colombia.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have spoken to Bill C-23 a number of times. The member for Burnaby—New Westminster should be congratulated for continuing to work in a co-operative manner to seek a solution to the impasse we have with this trade agreement. This trade agreement is wrong on a number of fronts.

These debates also show us what has happened in the House of Commons. Essentially the Liberal Party is facilitating this policy, through the Conservatives, and it has been done in a very interesting way. The Liberals removed their previous member from the

international trade committee, where they actually did have some reservations about this. The NDP and Bloc Québécois were solid in their position to have an investigative third-party evaluation before we went forward with this agreement, but the Liberals replaced their member with a former Conservative member who crossed the floor. That member has brought with him and the new leader an ideology of facilitating the Conservative government without any conditions at all.

It is unacceptable to stand here and not address the reality that a narco-state is being rewarded. It has a murderous agenda against its trade union members. It deals in cocaine, which affects many of the world population. Yet Canada wants to give it privileged access to Canadian markets. That is what we will do if the agreement goes forward without any terms or conditions. It has carve outs for labour and the environment and carve outs that allow businesses to trample on the rights of individuals. They could actually sue countries for their own interest rather than those of the population.

That in itself is bad enough, loading the deck to ensure that it has a balance against the balance of civil society, the elected members of the state and legislatures on both sides, in Canada and in Colombia. It also is a signal that we are telling the rest of the world that we are open for business with a narco-state, with a murderous agenda on trade union activists. We are not talking about just the mining activists, for example, who are fighting for workers' rights. People who are being murdered in Colombia are from the nurses union, teachers union and even from the prison union. They are from a number of different civil society organizations and bodies that have joined together, under the laws of that country, yet they keep getting killed or disappear. There is a pattern that can be, and has been by international independent analysis, traced back to the paramilitaries and to the governing party and the president. It brings it back to the state.

During this process, I had a chance to ask about some of those cases when the ambassador and representatives appeared before the committee. I read off four specific cases of people who were killed, recent trade union activists, men and women. I read their stories and I asked for a response. The representatives said that they had no response for those cases and that they would get back to me, which they did. They claim that every one of those cases was an act of passion by somebody in their relationship. It is absolute utter nonsense. The tribunals that have been established are not enough.

Canada is clearly telling the rest of the world that we are open for business, despite the crime, the corruption and the problems with that country. We will reward it first and give it privileged trade ability with our country. That is different from what has happened out there. The United States has put the brakes on this. It has realized, and it is a trading nation as well, that there is a responsibility for the governing body to bring this into line before the Colombians get privileged access to its market.

Government Orders

However, what are we doing? We are giving up. The Conservative government likes to huff and puff on crime all the time. How many times have I heard the Minister of Justice say that the Conservatives are going to crack down on crime, that they are going to produce all kinds of bills and policies. Interestingly enough, they do not even provide the proper supports in the system to implement those policies. It is very disingenuous. There is no way the justice committee can get through many of the bills that have been tabled, between the government bills and the private members' bills. The Conservatives keep announcing them and introducing them, knowing they cannot get through the system and that they will never see the light of day. Yet they are supposed to be cracking down on crime.

• (1330)

Why is it different internationally? Why can the Conservatives and Liberals not see that their actions are telling many other people across the globe that it is okay. It is a complete contradiction, but Canadians are not being fooled by the Conservatives or the Liberals.

For example, 50 prominent Canadians signed a letter to the Leader of the Opposition during their Vancouver meeting, which turned out to be bringing in a new leader without any type of discussion and no policy. That is their business, not ours. Regardless, those 50 prominent people did not even get an adequate response.

This is really important. Canadians understand where the Liberals have drifted. They have drifted to the benches over there. In fact, New Democrats are split up over here. What should happen is some of the Liberals should be over there and our group should be joined together. In fact, they can expand the bench.

I want to read from the letter to really get an idea of what we are talking about. Tique Adolfo, a trade union activist for agri-mining, was killed on January 1. Alexander Pinto of the prison trade workers union was killed by an unknown gunman. Over 2,000 activists over a number of years have been killed by unknown gunmen. Milton Blanco from the teachers union federation was killed on April 24, and there are many more.

It is sad because when we look at a country that should show leadership, it should be Canada. We were known for that in many respects, for being progressive, for being a country that was going to speak the truth to the powers that be, letting them know that if they wanted to work with us, we could do that. There have been many examples where we have, but at the same time, we would not give them the unconditional gift of access to our markets and to our people and a privileged relationship without any expectations.

That is what we have. Perhaps it is the influence of the mining industry in Canada. Perhaps it is just a grab for the agriculture elements. That is fine if we work with Colombia to change things. At the same time, there has to be a fair balance in this and that does not exist right now.

The debate began in 2008 when this was first announced. A standing committee went to Colombia to speak with officials, to see the things on the ground there. I know our member for Burnaby—New Westminster came back even more convinced that the approach should be to put pressure on the Colombia government, not rewarding it first by giving it this privileged trading relationship.

We have trade with Colombia right now. That will not change. There is an engaged relationship to begin with, but to give in on a privileged trading relationship with no terms and conditions is unacceptable.

What is the government and the Liberal Party afraid of? Are they afraid to have an independent analysis of the entire trading agreement and the relationship and the issues that are taking place, where so many people are being murdered? Are they afraid they will find the paramilitary, the government and some of the cocaine and other industries tied together perhaps? Are they afraid that Canadians might wake up and realize that their tough on crime government, the Conservative Party of Canada, is so weak internationally on crime that it does not care if a narco-state gets access to a privileged trading relationship? It does not care if those drugs end up on the streets of Canada because we will trade with them no matter what. We will do it unconditionally and then hope the Colombians change their practices. In the meantime, they can continue to do what they are because we do not want to have any type of dissension. Nor do we not want to have our country being one that leads the way, that says that there has to be a sense of social justice, and trading principles are tied to that, to build a better world for all of us.

• (1335)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member outlined how, at one point in this process, the Liberal members were more or less on side opposing this bill. Particularly last year in 2008, the House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade recommended that no agreement be signed with Colombia until the human rights situation there had been improved.

It also recommended that a human rights impact assessment be undertaken to determine the real impact of the trade agreement, and of course the government ignored that. In the meantime, the Liberals somehow managed to disengage themselves and ended up siding with the Conservatives.

Could the member detail the process that allowed the Liberals to move to where they are now?

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, essentially that was very disappointing. Given the increased evidence of the regime in Colombia and the continuation of assassinations really warrants a third party independent analysis. It would at least be a basis for engaging in a constructive approach to dealing with this issue and the challenge of giving a privileged trading relationship to a narco-state with such a murderous past and present. That at least would provide us with an opportunity to have a greater indepth discussion.

The Liberal Party has been shifting to the right quite significantly and has mirrored the Conservative Party in so many aspects. It has just simply given in. A delegation went to Colombia for a second time. Perhaps those people were wined and dined. I have no idea. However, they came back without recommending that analysis, which is unfortunate. We need a balanced approach. We could then have a greater indepth debate before giving a privileged trading relationship to Colombia for nothing.

Government Orders

• (1340)

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, the member also has detailed the fact that the NDP believes in fair trade agreements as opposed to free trade agreements. Would the member give some examples of what he thinks would constitute a fair trade agreement, where proper social, environmental and labour standards built into it so the agreement would be good for both sides?

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, the member has asked an important question with regard to labour and environmental standards, which have been carved out of this agreement and put into side agreements. We have never had a successful challenge under NAFTA on a side agreement. It is important to recognize that because side agreements are seen as offshoots as opposed to being the centre of gravity of an agreement. We need to have balanced environmental and labour standards.

The member for Winnipeg Centre has spoken strongly on the issue of asbestos in Canada. We would not want to degrade our environment or subject our citizens to bad policy just to get an economic advantage over someone else. That is the wrong approach.

We want to operate from a principled point, and that being that all workers deserve the same rights and the same support. That is how a country can enter into a competitive fair system where trade is open and beneficial and the economies of both countries will grow in a responsible way as opposed to what could happen as a result of this agreement.

There could be exploitation as a result of this agreement through substandard mining and other types of practices that could really undermine not only the short-term of the country, because of the damage done to the environment, but also to the long-term of the country could be destroyed for generations.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise again to speak to Bill C-23, the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act.

In 2007, the Conservative government stepped up negotiations with Colombia to conclude a free trade agreement and promote the government's foreign and trade policy in the Americas. Ironically, the Canadian government intensified its talks with the Colombian government at a time when U.S. negotiations with Colombia had just been blocked, as members will recall, because of the many human rights violations in that country and its lack of real labour and environmental measures.

These issues are the reasons why the Bloc Québécois is opposed to this bill. We believe that signing a free trade agreement with this country raises very serious problems, because Colombia has the worst human rights record in the hemisphere. That is not insignificant. These issues are also the reasons why the House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade, of which I was a member at the time, decided to conduct a comprehensive review of the appropriateness of an agreement with Colombia.

But lo and behold—and I think it is important to remind the members of the House about this—on June 7, 2008, after just five rounds of negotiations, the Conservative government officially announced that a free trade agreement had been concluded with

Colombia. The Minister of International Trade confirmed the free trade agreement, even though the Standing Committee on International Trade, which was studying the possibility of such an agreement, had not yet heard all the planned witnesses, produced its report or submitted its final recommendations to the House.

The Conservative government invested thousands of dollars to send the Standing Committee on International Trade to meet with various stakeholders in Colombia. We met with union representatives, members of the government and civil society groups. After meeting with all these people, the committee was supposed to report on this mission and all the consultations. But the agreement was signed before the committee made its report to the House. This is shameful.

Last Saturday, I read an article on the front page of *Le Devoir*, explaining how the Conservative Party does not respect the work done in this House, or in the various committees. For all intents and purposes, the Prime Minister is the only one to have powers. The ministers do not seem very present, and they do not seem very familiar with their files. So, the Prime Minister and his cabinet simply took it upon themselves to sign this agreement without respecting the parliamentary process, which is about reviewing studies, committee reports and reports presented to the House.

Again, I think that Quebeckers are increasingly aware of the fact that the Conservative Party does not respect the will of the House of Commons, or the rules of Parliament. It simply does as it pleases. It deals with the legislation without any ethics. It does not respect any values. It does not care about the fact that all MPs in this House should have their say regarding an agreement or a bill. In this case, we are talking about the free trade agreement with Colombia.

During our trip, we noticed some serious human rights issues. The murdering of human rights activists, trade unionists and people who are simply seeking a better life is still a reality in Colombia.

• (1345)

It is through force and repression that the Colombian government is implementing its neo-liberal economic model. Over the past 10 years, Colombia has been torn by unprecedented violence. Thousands of people have disappeared and over 2,500 trade unionists have been assassinated, which accounts for 64% of all the unionists killed in the world.

Right now, we have a Conservative government that is prepared to sign a trade agreement with the Uribe government. However, Uribe himself and a number of his parliamentarians are facing court proceedings for activities that are said to be improper, to put it mildly.

Government Orders

The Conservative government and the Liberals know that the situation in Colombia is not ideal. There is poverty and violence. Moreover, services are hard to access. I was shocked and devastated by the scope of population displacements, which is a tragedy in itself. Entire populations are relocated in suburbs of the capital, because mining companies come and settle on the land and just get rid of the populations that live there. These companies take these people's homes and lands, and they send them to live in shantytowns, so that they can begin their mining operations and, ultimately, exploit workers. These companies organize things so that workers cannot protect their rights, their conditions and their quality of life. They are then in a position to exploit these workers even more.

This free trade agreement is unfortunate for Quebec and all of Canada. We are signing with Colombia an agreement that only protects mining companies and that allows them to get rich at the expense of Colombia's workers and environment, by exploiting and displacing thousands of people and sending them to live in shantytowns. The agreement is very helpful in this respect. We must say so, because it is shameful. It is incredible that the government would behave in this fashion.

Our committee prepared a report and made recommendations. Now, even though the Conservative Party did not read that report, the fact remains that the committee did an important job of examining the impact of this agreement.

But the government decided to sign the agreement even before the committee had presented its report. It is with this in mind that the amendment presented today by the Bloc Québécois is worded. The message sent by the government to parliamentarians is: regardless of what you may think and say, we are going to do as we please. The Prime Minister does as he pleases. Worse still, he said the same thing to the large number of witnesses who came to express their views on this agreement.

We cannot support the government's scornful, stubborn attitude. We condemn and refuse to accept its authoritarian approach. Most importantly, we will never accept an agreement with a country that does not respect the basic human rights of its own people.

Despite countless human rights violations, the Canadian government, with Liberal support, wants to sign a free trade agreement with Colombia.

Neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals seem to care about all of the murdered union members. Both the Conservatives and the Liberals seem to be unfazed by failure to respect the environment.

• (1350)

Human rights will be trampled in the interest of promoting free trade. The Bloc Québécois cannot accept that.

Unlike the Conservative Party, the Bloc Québécois is not made up of narrow-minded ideologues. And unlike the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois is not opportunistic, nor does it hesitate to defend the values of Quebecers.

We are against this free trade agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia because it is a bad agreement, and I urge all parliamentarians to reject it.

[English]

NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

An agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Colombia and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Colombia.

Therefore under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the said stage.

SECOND READING

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend for his comments.

On average, approximately three people are killed by landmines every day in Colombia. That is three people every day.

I would like to ask the hon. member first of all whether that is of concern to him and secondly whether the government should be signing a treaty with that country.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André: Of course not, Mr. Speaker.

The Bloc Québécois has shown—and the NDP has done a good job too—that there have been too many violations of human and environmental rights in Colombia. The Colombian government is not trustworthy and has been involved in a large number of court cases for failure to respect basic human rights. This issue is very complex.

That is why we cannot support this bill. If Canada signs this agreement with Colombia, we will be forced to hang our head in shame on the world stage because Canada and Quebec supposedly respect human and environmental rights. Or at least some members of this House do. Everyone knows what is going on in Copenhagen. Canada cannot sign this kind of agreement.

• (1355)

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé for his speech. I understand he was a member of the committee that went to Colombia to study the free trade arrangement between Colombia and Canada.

I would like him to tell me about the frustration he felt when the government ignored every one of the committee's recommendations. In addition, the government signed the free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia before it had even received the report.

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Shefford for his excellent question.

On the first page of the weekend edition of *Le Devoir*, they say flat out that the Conservative Party has no respect for the rules and processes of Parliament or the work done by committees. The government signed the agreement, but previous to that, it spent money to send some committee members to Colombia to meet people there and improve their understanding of all the effects the agreement would have.

The government ignored the ensuing recommendations and did not even have the time to read the committee's report. It just signed the agreement with Colombia. There was a lack of transparency here and a lack of respect for the democratic rules of Canada and Quebecers.

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know what my colleague thinks of this Reform government, which is in favour of law and order for everything that moves but is currently negotiating an agreement under Bill C-23 with narco-politicians, even though that is totally contrary to its ideology.

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, my colleague asks a very good question.

This really is amazing. As she said, several members of the Uribe government are facing charges related to drug trafficking. They also have ties to the paramilitaries and have been linked to the assassination of some union leaders. They connive with particular mining companies and in the displacement of large civilian populations into ghettos and shantytowns so that the mining companies can take over. It is a disgrace.

What kind of a government is this? It is as if the Conservatives said they wanted to do business with a motorcycle gang or a group involved in illegal activities. That is what the agreement is all about. They are signing a free trade agreement with people who show no respect for democratic rules, human rights and the environment in the pursuit of their economic interests.

This bill only encourages our Canadian companies to do the same in Colombia. We are told the agreement will make Colombians wealthier. But when we went into the field in Colombia, all the members of civil society, all the government members and the companies told us not to sign the agreement because it would not help them at all.

Of course the Bloc Québécois will vote against this agreement.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDSHIP CENTRES

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is a historic day for the National Association of Friendship Centres here in Canada. As MPs we all have aboriginal and non-aboriginal constituents who benefit from the services provided by aboriginal friendship centres.

Statements by Members

My constituency is served by three centres. There is the Sagitawa Friendship Society, the High Level Native Friendship Centre Society, and the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre.

Being acutely aware of the good work done by friendship centres, I am proud to be co-chair, along with the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, of the friendship centres all-party caucus to be announced later today.

Friendship centres are Canada's most significant aboriginal service delivery infrastructure. Every region in Canada from sea to sea is served by at least one friendship centre. Championing this good cause will provide all MPs an opportunity to work together for a common cause. I truly hope that colleagues of all parties will join in our efforts.

* * *

BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a remarkable woman from Rushoon, a small rural community in Newfoundland and Labrador. On November 5, Mrs. Margaret Moores turned 104.

Mrs. Moores was born, raised and has lived most of her life in Rushoon. She and her husband, Arch, were married for 64 years and raised four children. For the last 18 years she has been living with her daughter, Marie, and her son-in-law, Patrick Cheeseman. She has 12 grandchildren, four of whom are members of the Royal Canadian Forces, and 14 great-grandchildren.

I visited with her recently and was amazed by her recollection of events that have occurred in her 104 years. This is a lady who saw the first car when it arrived in St. John's, Newfoundland. She witnessed the formal unveiling of the National War Memorial in St. John's on July 1, 1924, and she can recall many details of life in Newfoundland, pre-Confederation.

Mrs. Moores is not remarkable just because of her age. She is incredibly active, has a keen mind and memory, and at 104, does not take any medication.

I ask all members of the House to join me in recognizing Mrs. Moores and her 104 years.

* * *

[Translation]

ABORIGINAL FRIENDSHIP CENTRES

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, representatives of aboriginal friendship centres are on the Hill today to make the government and elected officials aware of the need to increase the budgets allocated to their activities although the Minister of Canadian Heritage refused to meet with them.

Aboriginal friendship centres are vital to aboriginal Canadians who live in urban areas. The centres provide services that correspond to their specific cultural context and help them find the support they need outside of their communities.

The services offered vary between centres and include early childhood and youth assistance, education, employment, training, social services and health services, just to name a few.

Statements by Members

On behalf of the members of the Bloc Québécois, I would like to commend the unique contribution made by aboriginal friendship centres in urban settings throughout Quebec and Canada.

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[English]

OSTEOPOROSIS MONTH

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, November is Osteoporosis Month. Osteoporosis can be debilitating, painful and dangerous, especially because many people are unaware they have it until a painful fracture occurs. Osteoporosis Canada has launched an awareness campaign, as over two million Canadians suffer from this disease, including one in four women and one in eight men over the age of 50.

The health care cost of treating osteoporosis and fractures in Canada is estimated to be around \$2 billion annually, and it is on the rise along with the aging Canadian population.

Until fairly recently, most people considered osteoporosis and broken bones to be a normal part of aging. This is simply not the case. Julie Foley, the president and CEO of Osteoporosis Canada, states: "Osteoporosis can have significant impact on an individual's quality of life. Recognizing osteoporosis risk factors and being proactive about them is an important step to a healthier, fracture-free future".

I would like to remind all Canadians that it is never too late to take steps to slow or stop the onset of osteoporosis.

* * *

FRASER RIVER SOCKEYE

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to compliment the Prime Minister for his announcement of a judicial inquiry into the management of the Fraser River sockeye.

If the government of the day had initiated a judicial inquiry into the management of Atlantic cod when the department's inability to respond to the first signs of the impending disaster became apparent, then perhaps, just perhaps, the collapse of the Atlantic cod might have been prevented.

Fraser River sockeye will not be allowed to go the way of the Atlantic cod because the Prime Minister takes seriously his duty to protect the fishery and all who depend on it. He has called for a judicial inquiry to investigate all aspects of the fishery. The inquiry will have the ability to subpoena witnesses, take testimony under oath and, most important, will have access to all fisheries department records and personnel.

The courage the Prime Minister has shown in calling this inquiry will ensure that sockeye salmon will be there in abundant numbers for future generations.

● (1405)

[Translation]

CANADIAN NAVY MEMBERS

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I wish to thank the Canadian sailors who recently welcomed me and shared their lives and their work with me.

The Canadian Forces Parliamentary Program gave me the opportunity to learn about the activities of the Maritime Forces Pacific during a four-day voyage on the frigate HMCS *Regina*. I have participated in the program before and each time it has proven to be a useful and rewarding experience. Discovering the day-to-day life of Canadians in the armed forces, whether in the navy or other corps, has enabled me to better understand the living conditions in which they train and to appreciate their professionalism and deep commitment to Canada.

I thank the sailors and in particular the commander of HMCS *Regina*, Derek Moss, and his crew. They have my full support for the extraordinary work they do in protecting our country and conducting peace missions throughout the world.

* * *

[English]

CHARITY HOCKEY GAMES

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative team works hard in the House for all Canadians, and we also work hard on the ice to help raise money for our local communities.

Last night I was able to lace up my skates with some of my Conservative colleagues, former NHL players and community leaders to help raise money for the United Way of Leeds—Grenville.

Our Conservative MPs have been part of numerous charity hockey games, spanning the ridings of Edmonton—Leduc and Wild Rose, Alberta to Barrie and Peterborough in Ontario. These games have raised money for local United Ways, the Royal Victoria Hospital, boys and girls clubs and victim assistance funds.

These games have been part of my colleagues' efforts to raise more than half a million dollars for various charities.

This is not going to stop. On this side of the House, we have found another great way to show real leadership and assistance for the very communities we represent.

We lace them up, and in Conservative ridings we are getting it done for local charities.

* * *

[Translation]

GRENVILLE CANAL

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, because of a wording technicality, a petition signed by over 2,700 people, prepared by the committee to save the Grenville Canal, could not be tabled in the House. Allow me to read a few lines:

Whereas the Grenville Canal is a significant historic heritage site for Quebec and Canada;

Whereas the retaining walls and shoreline of the Grenville Canal are currently in a serious state of deterioration that has led to the closure of the canal;

Whereas the federal government, which had assumed ownership and management of the canal for 161 years, is responsible for the country's historic sites and waterways.

For all these reasons, the members of the committee, who are here on the Hill today led by the Mayor of Grenville, Mr. Ronald Tittlit, on behalf of the petitioners, are calling on the federal government to assume the costs of restoring and repairing the shoreline and retaining walls of the Grenville Canal.

* * *

CANADA-JORDAN FREE TRADE

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, our government introduced new legislation to implement the Canada-Jordan Free Trade Agreement.

When this agreement goes into effect, tariffs on 99% of Canadian exports to Jordan will be eliminated and exporters of forest, agriculture and agri-food products will have immediate access to Jordan's markets.

Our Conservative government is working hard to open new markets for our companies. For example, we have entered into free trade agreements with Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Colombia, Peru, Jordan and Panama.

This agreement with Jordan is another example of our government's efforts to provide new trade opportunities for our businesses.

* * *

• (1410)

[English]

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDSHIP CENTRES

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the National Association of Friendship Centres' president, Vera Pawis Tabobondung, and the negotiating committee chair, Sylvia Maracle, who are in Ottawa today.

I would also like to congratulate the National Association of Friendship Centres on the launch of the federal friendship centre caucus tonight, a group comprised of representatives from all political parties in support of the friendship centre movement.

The National Association of Friendships Centres has been assisting and supporting first nation, Inuit and Métis nation community members for more than 50 years. More and more aboriginal people find themselves living in cities and towns across Canada. For many aboriginal Canadians, friendship centres are the first and only place to turn upon leaving their communities and homes.

Friendship centres continue to dedicate themselves tirelessly to providing necessary services to aboriginal families and children during their difficult transition from rural or remote life to an urban environment.

Statements by Members

The Liberal Party recognizes the crucial role that friendship centres play in improving the lives and meeting the needs of aboriginal peoples in urban centres across the country—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg South.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise first to personally welcome delegates from the National Association of Friendship Centres to Parliament Hill. Our government appreciates the hard work and services these centres provide and we remain committed to increasing opportunities for aboriginals across this country.

Second, I am honoured to welcome 14 National Aboriginal Achievement Award recipients. Each year, the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation recognizes the outstanding career accomplishments of aboriginal peoples within Canada. In reviewing the contributions of these award winners, I believe that the goal of providing role models for aboriginal youth is being achieved. The categories for which they are being recognized include health, public service, sports, and lifetime achievement, which was given to Elder William Commanda, who turned 96 on November 11.

As chair of the government's aboriginal caucus, I welcome all of them to Parliament Hill.

* * *

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDSHIP CENTRES

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the National Association of Friendship Centres today profiles the good work that friendship centres do from coast to coast to coast and the need for an increase in their budgets.

Friendship centres are Canada's largest aboriginal service delivery infrastructure. They deliver effective, accountable programs and services to first nations, Métis and Inuit people, regardless of status or location. When it comes to urban aboriginal peoples, no other organization, program or policy has as much impact as friendship centres.

The Indian Friendship Centre in Sault Ste. Marie has grown by 50% in the last three years. It offers valuable programs for employment, healing, prevention, youth, families, nutrition, court and much more. The Sault centre needs funding to match its growth. There has been no increase in core funding since 1996. There has been nothing for inflation, population growth or changing demands.

I join with my colleagues on both sides of the House in calling on the government to include additional funding for friendship centres in next year's budget.

*Oral Questions***INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today our government introduced legislation to implement the Canada-Jordan free trade agreement. Agricultural exports to Jordan currently face tariffs ranging as high as 180%. When this agreement enters into force, 99% of tariffs on Canadian exports to Jordan will be immediately eliminated.

Not only will Canadian exporters significantly benefit from this agreement, but Canadian consumers will have access to cheaper products at the checkout. This FTA will help create jobs and stimulate Canada's economy. Canadian exporters will benefit from duty-free access to Jordan in forestry, manufacturing and agriculture and agri-food products such as pulses, frozen products and beef.

Canadian farmers know that this Conservative government is working hard to open new international markets to increase their sales. Our free trade agreements with the European Free Trade Association, Colombia, Peru, Jordan and Panama are all proof. I am proud to say that this free trade agreement is another example of what our government is doing to open new doors for Canadian businesses.

* * *

[*Translation*]**ELECTION OF A NEW MEMBER IN THE RIDING OF HOCHELAGA**

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to mention the resounding victory of my new colleague, Daniel Paillé, in the riding of Hochelaga, on Monday, November 9, 2009.

He won 51.2% of the vote, an absolute majority, and the voters of Hochelaga unequivocally chose the only candidate who is able to stand up for Quebec in Ottawa, the only candidate who can defend the interests of his nation, Daniel Paillé. The best the Conservatives could do was 4th place, with a paltry 10.1%.

I would also like to acknowledge the excellent showing of Nancy Gagnon in Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup. She put up a good fight throughout the campaign.

Lastly, I would like to thank all of the campaigners who helped out with these two political battles.

My colleagues and I would like to welcome Daniel Paillé to the Bloc Québécois caucus.

* * *

●(1415)

[*English*]**ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after a long court process, the Supreme Court of Canada indicated that it would not hear the Sharon McIvor case regarding Bill C-31. It is now up to the federal government to reverse the historical injustices that first nations women have faced under the Indian Act.

In 1985, the government attempted to eliminate sex discrimination under the act with Bill C-31. While it solved some issues, there were unintended discriminatory consequences. This time the government must do it right. As Ms. McIvor has stated, "It is unacceptable that sex discrimination in the registration provisions of the Indian Act continue". Ms. McIvor further stated that the government's "proposed amendment will not extend registration entitlement to everyone who would be entitled if status were determined by the federal government on a totally non-discriminatory basis".

This must be fixed. It is essential that we as Canadians get this right. It must be done in full consultation with first nations people and most certainly first nations women.

* * *

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government remains focused on the economy and on helping Canadians. We continue to implement Canada's economic action plan to help combat the effects of the global recession.

We are working with provinces, territories and municipalities to invest in infrastructure projects that are creating jobs and making communities, big and small, across Canada better places to live, work and raise a family.

We have reduced taxes on families and businesses, and implemented measures such as the home renovation tax credit and the first-time homebuyers' tax credit. We are helping the unemployed by extending EI benefits, making it easier to qualify and expanding EI skills training programs.

However, we know that global economic recovery remains fragile. By calling for tax hikes and by voting against help for the unemployed, it seems clear that the Liberal leader is not in it for Canadians.

Our government will always put Canada first.

ORAL QUESTIONS[*Translation*]**THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the past four years, this government has been promising Canadians a plan to reduce greenhouse gases. Every time, it pushes back the deadlines.

Today the Minister of the Environment has once again said he will not announce any action plan until the end of 2010. The conference in Copenhagen is three weeks away. How can we protect the environment if the government refuses to take a position?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is working constructively with our partners around the world to ensure that we tackle global warming and the challenge of climate change.

What we will not do is make promises that we cannot keep. The Minister of the Environment has worked very hard with the Obama administration in Washington to ensure that we can deliver on meaningful reductions around the world. The Minister of the Environment and this government will continue to play a constructive role in every corner of the world to ensure that we tackle this major problem.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has been giving that reply for nearly four years. Three plans, three ministers, no action.

The government keeps promising Canadians this plan, but the environment minister reported from Copenhagen today that the government is going to put off all publication of regulations until the end of 2010. The conference in Copenhagen is three weeks away.

How are Canadians supposed to believe that the government is going to defend their interests when the government has no plan whatever?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has come forward with significant measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, regulating large final emitters, a plan that will see a 20% reduction in greenhouse gases, something that will be unprecedented with our major trading partners. That is real leadership.

We have seen the Minister of the Environment come forward with initiatives to work with the United States with respect to automobiles, with respect to aviation emissions. This government is committed to working with the Obama administration to get the job done, which never happened in the 13 long years that the Liberal Party was in power.

• (1420)

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the minister that the Conservatives have been in office for four long years. They cannot keep blaming other people.

The Conservatives talk about leadership. I will tell the House what leadership looks like. China has invested \$250 billion in green tech. The United States is investing six times per capita what we are doing.

It is one thing not to lead but it is another thing to not even follow. Why has Canada fallen so far behind?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, back in 1997 the world came together in Kyoto and signed an international agreement.

Instead of reducing greenhouse gases in this country, the Liberals watched greenhouse gases soar each and every year that they were in power. They never came forward with a single initiative. They never came forward with a plan. Emissions were up by 30%.

Oral Questions

We are committed to accepting our international responsibilities on the global climate. We are committed to taking real action. One thing we will not do is sit back and allow greenhouse gases to go up by 30%, something that is the sorry record of the Liberal Party opposite.

* * *

HEALTH

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to repeat a very simple question I asked yesterday.

The Minister of Health first claimed that every Canadian who wanted the H1N1 vaccine would receive it before Christmas. Last Tuesday, November 10, she said the rollout would take at least eight and maybe twelve more weeks.

Why the change? Why the delay maybe into February?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, presently 20% of Canadians have received the H1N1 vaccine. We were early in getting the vaccine rolled out. Canadians will continue to receive the vaccine. We hope to have it completed by the end of the year.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have asked very clear questions of the minister for weeks, even months, but we never get the clear answers that Canadians need. This is about the health of Canadians. They deserve openness and honesty.

Could the minister explain why the vast majority of Canadians will not be vaccinated before the peak of this pandemic? Why will some have to wait until next year?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Very simply, Mr. Speaker. By the end of this week, 10.4 million vaccines will be in the hands of the provinces and territories. Twenty per cent of Canadians have received the vaccine to date.

Again, I will say in this House as I said yesterday, some jurisdictions will be completing their vaccine rollout by the end of this week. All Canadians who want to receive the vaccine will be able to do so.

* * *

[Translation]

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister wants to take advantage of India's economic boom and sell Candu nuclear reactors to that country, whose electricity needs continue to grow. Yet India refuses to sign the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. In the past, that country has even used the Candu reactor's civilian nuclear technology to build a nuclear bomb.

Is it not irresponsible on the part of the government to sell nuclear reactors to a country that has not signed the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, especially considering India's dubious past in that regard?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is very proud of its technology with respect to nuclear energy. We have been very successful in selling it around the world. It is incredibly important to ensure that we not only have a marketplace around the world but that we have one in which we are following the rules that are set down by international standards, and those are the standards that we will abide by.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am not asking the minister if she is proud of the Candu technology. I am asking her if it is responsible to sell nuclear weapons to a country that has not signed the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Canada is losing all credibility, especially considering the situation in Iran.

How can we say anything to Iran when we are selling weapons to a country that refuses to sign that treaty? Should we not insist that India sign the treaty before we sell them our reactors?

• (1425)

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we all know, India has made substantial non-proliferation and disarmament commitments to achieve the trust of the nuclear suppliers group which were reiterated in a political statement on September 5. India has agreed to remain committed to a voluntary unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing.

I remind the leader of the second party that no agreement has yet been signed.

* * *

*[Translation]***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, by telling us this morning that Canada has to wait longer still to regulate greenhouse gas emissions, the minister for big oil is showing once again that the environment is not a priority for this government. Instead of stepping up efforts to get an agreement on strict reduction targets, he is instead working on derailing the Copenhagen summit and prefers to conduct his business without any regard for the consequences.

Does the Prime Minister realize that his approach, which pits the economy against the environment, is viewed as disastrous by the experts?

[English]

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before in this chamber, there is no minister for big oil in this government. Therefore, there will not be any minister responding to that silly question.

*[Translation]***NUCLEAR ENERGY**

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is not just one minister for big oil, there are several.

While the Prime Minister strives to do as little as possible for the environment at the APEC meeting, he is rushing to sell Candu nuclear reactors to India without first obtaining any guarantee that the equipment will be used safely and for peaceful purposes.

Will the Prime Minister admit that the only thing that matters to him is the profits of oil companies and the nuclear industry to the detriment of all other considerations such as the environment and safety?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Natural Resources.

No.

The hon. member for Vancouver East has the floor.

[English]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the last time Canada sold nuclear reactors to India, it turned around and developed its first atomic weapon, with the unauthorized help of our nuclear technology. Many Canadians are concerned that removing the ban on nuclear sales with India could mean we will be fuelling the nuclear arms race in the region. India has never signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Given the current tensions in the region, what guarantees is the government demanding in exchange for restarting nuclear sales to India?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the member that India is a responsible democracy that shares with Canada the fundamental values of freedom, democracy, human rights and respect, as well as rule of law.

Canada's support for this exception for India marks a turning point in our bilateral relations. And, as I said, India has agreed to remain committed to a voluntary unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, voluntary agreements just do not cut it. The eagerness of the Conservatives to sell nuclear technology to a country that has refused to sign the treaty is deeply concerning. As a signatory to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, Canada has a moral obligation to ensure that its nuclear technology is used for peaceful purposes.

So, I ask again, are the Conservatives going to insist that India sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty before they sell it more nukes or uranium?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would point out to my hon. colleague that other signatories to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty have already signed agreements with India. They, too, recognize that India is, today, a responsible democracy that shares with all of the democracies of the world our values of freedom and the rule of law.

Oral Questions

● (1430)

[Translation]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, nuclear energy is the antithesis of sustainable development. It is so dangerous that the Conservatives have introduced legislation to limit corporate liability in the event of a disaster. Canada seems to have forgotten the lessons of Chernobyl.

The design of our reactors is outdated and highly susceptible to serious accidents. Furthermore, the problem of nuclear waste disposal has yet to be resolved.

Why is it that from Pickering to Point Lepreau to Gentilly, we are allowing the construction of new nuclear plants rather than encouraging safe, green energy—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Natural Resources.

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to admit it is quite staggering to hear the fearmongering on the other side of the House for an industry which is so important to this country, in terms of exports and the amount of hard-working men and women who work in this industry, and the great amounts of innovation and ingenuity that have come out of this industry in the past 50 years.

We are very proud of the nuclear industry in this country. In fact, that is exactly why we are ongoing in terms of making it better, making it stronger, and ensuring that we have good, high-paying jobs here in Canada.

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*[Translation]***POLITICAL PARTY FINANCING**

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in light of the increasing suspicions surrounding the fundraising activities of Senator Housakos, yesterday I asked the Conservatives to table in this House the report on the inquiry regarding Mr. Housakos' background before he was appointed to the other place.

If the Conservatives are confident that he has nothing to hide, I am sure that they will respond to my request today.

I will ask again. Can we see the inquiry report?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the once great Liberal Party now only has what is basically character assassination and meanspirited personal mudslinging. In fact, its character assassination is fact-free.

Let me tell members what this government has done with respect to campaign funding and campaign fundraising ethics. This is the government which banned corporations from donating to political parties in Canada. This is the government which banned unions from making big donations to political parties. This is the government which limited contributions to a mere \$1,000 per person.

This is the most major political funding reform in Canadian history. We brought in the toughest anti-corruption law in Canadian history with the ejection of the Liberal Party—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Hull—Aylmer.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there seem to be a lot of coincidences. Serge Martel helped Mr. Housakos with ADQ fundraising, then Mr. Housakos had Serge Martel appointed to the board of The Jacques Cartier and Champlain Bridges Incorporated. Then, Mr. Martel participated in a fundraising event with representatives of Senator Housakos' employer, BPR. What a surprise. Soon after, BPR was awarded a contract to do work on the Champlain bridge.

If that is not considered returning the favour, then I do not know what is.

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Senator Housakos proactively asked the Senate ethics commissioner to examine this matter, but let me tell members what Canadians expect all of us in the House to do.

They expect us to be focusing on the real issues facing Canadians like the economic global crisis. This government's economic action plan is doing a lot to contribute more hope and opportunity, to create new jobs in this country. They expect us to be tackling the problem of H1N1, which public health nurses and the Minister of Health and her team, and the Public Health Agency are doing. They expect us to focus on real results for Canadians and not the fact-free allegations from the member opposite.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want to know what action the Prime Minister will take to discipline his ethically challenged Minister of Natural Resources.

It is not good enough to change rules for the future. Canadians want to know the consequences for the rules she has already broken, rules that have been in place for 25 years: the conflict of interest guidelines and the code of ethics for cabinet ministers.

When will the Prime Minister enforce the rules that already exist?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is no coincidence that no member of the frontbench on the Liberal side would ask this type of question. Her tone is regrettable; her comments are outrageous. They are, frankly, not worthy of any response.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is typical. The Conservatives get somebody to start badmouthing.

Oral Questions

There is a troubling pattern emerging about the minister and what the government receives as acceptable behaviour. The minister was illegally signing off on her own expenses, minutes of board meetings were being doctored, and partisan fundraisers were using public resources. Conservatives say all this is just normal practice. It is not normal for most Canadians.

When will the Conservatives stop the cover-up and call in the Auditor General?

• (1435)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite had the courage of her convictions, I would encourage her to repeat these baseless and crazy allegations outside the House, but I regret to inform the House that I do not think we are going to see that happen because what we have seen is smear and character assassination.

All the once great Liberal Party can do is throw mud, all it can do is attack people personally, and that is regrettable. It does not serve its constituents and, frankly, it does not serve the member opposite very well.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the United States, executives from companies like Nissan and FedEx have joined forces to promote electric cars. Like the Bloc Québécois, this coalition believes that electric cars are the way of the future and will help protect the environment by reducing oil dependency.

By failing to attach such conditions to the \$10 billion aid package for the auto industry, have the Conservatives once again shown that they are on side with oil companies and the old gas-guzzling economy?

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, working in collaboration with my colleagues from Quebec on this side of the House, we have actually been able to provide a great amount of funding to Quebec for companies within Quebec on the renewable side of the ledger. In fact, four wind parks and one hydro project totalling \$150.5 million have been funded by Canadian taxpayers; a further \$62.4 million by Sustainable Development Technology Canada, new clean technology again in the province of Quebec; and, finally, \$130 million for biofuels in the province of Quebec.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am not talking about renewable energy. I am talking about electric cars. That is the reality.

Like the American coalition, the Bloc Québécois has proposed a plan to support electric car development by increasing funding for research and development, building the necessary infrastructure and encouraging people to buy these cars.

When will the government stop working for the oil companies and seriously consider our proposals?

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member should know, electric cars plug into an electrical grid and what I have just indicated are ways of renewable electricity that we have actually been funding.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Senator Housakos is very influential. In addition to looking after Conservative Party financing, he is involved in awarding contracts. Several members of his gang have been appointed to government positions. One has gone to the Employment Insurance Board of Referees, a second to VIA Rail and a third to Jacques Cartier and Champlain Bridges Incorporated.

Will the Minister of Public Works, who is minister of patronage, see to it that the Housakos network stops being rewarded?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc may not like it, but appointments are based on merit.

If the Bloc members want to make allegations that we broke the law, let them do so outside the House. For three or four weeks, they have been insinuating all sorts of things and wasting the House's time.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister of patronage recognized himself, because he stood up. Serge Martel, a buddy of Senator Housakos' who was named to the board of directors of Jacques Cartier and Champlain Bridges Incorporated, admits that he made a mistake when he attended a cocktail fundraiser for the Conservative Party organized by Senator Housakos.

Does the minister of patronage still find this situation acceptable, when Serge Martel himself acknowledges that he made a mistake?

The Speaker: The hon.—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour has the floor. Order, please.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1440)

[English]

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour has the floor.

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POVERTY

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recently learned that part of the \$45 million used to erect signs for Conservative propaganda was used to advertise the installation of other signs.

Oral Questions

In front of Gatineau's Place Du Centre, one sign advertises a study of overhead signage; signs promoting signs, propaganda for propaganda. This is sheer utter waste.

Meanwhile, we find out today that food bank usage is skyrocketing across the country, especially among children.

When will the government stop spending tax dollars on propaganda and start helping Canadians, many of whom must line up at Canada's food banks?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Food Banks Canada for the fine job that it has been doing in helping those people who are facing some very challenging times during the global recession.

However, it is not the only one helping these people. Our government, through our economic action plan, has been providing more EI benefits for them. We have increased the assistance available to them in helping them find the skills for the jobs of the future. We have also increased WITB, which is a benefit to help them get over the welfare wall and some 900,000 people were helped by this program in the first year alone.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we need to do something to help food banks. Almost 800,000 Canadians walked into food banks in March, which is an 18% increase over last year. Seven provinces saw double digit increases in food bank use.

While Canadian families struggle, the Conservative propaganda machine is in overdrive, wastefully advertising the politically motivated stimulus plan.

Does the government not understand that stimulus funds could also go to some of those who need help the most: the victims of this Conservative recession who are lining up at food banks across Canada? Maybe they could put a sign on that.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the government's economic action plan, let me tell the House what we have done.

We had a choice. We could have increased funds for social programs to support important services and social services in health care and in post-secondary education, or we could have done what the Liberal Party did when it was in office, which was to cut social programs by more than \$25 billion.

We made an important decision to provide an economic stimulus to create more jobs, more hope and opportunity. We are working constructively with the provinces. We are beginning to see some positive economic signs. The recovery that we see is fragile and this government will put Canadian families first and not an unnecessary election like the members opposite.

* * *

[Translation]

PENSIONS

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while Canadian pensioners are anxiously

watching their pension funds disappear before their eyes, the Conservatives are not taking the situation seriously.

Employees of AbitibiBowater and Fraser Paper are seeing reductions of up to 40% in their current and future pensions. This process affects not just these individuals, but also the entire economy of these communities. The Conservatives have to take action and stop being insensitive to the needs of the people.

Why are they not taking the necessary measures to save the pension funds of these Canadians? It is a simple question: why?

[English]

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are sensitive, of course, to the challenges faced by the families and the workers in the communities in this situation. We are committed to helping the industry find long-term solutions to these challenges while respecting our international obligations.

Of course the pensions at AbitibiBowater are provincially regulated. It is for this reason that the union of course is requesting meetings with provincial government representatives from several provinces and, as AbitibiBowater is currently under bankruptcy protection, it would not be appropriate to comment further.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they are so sensitive that they are doing absolutely nothing for pensioners in the country.

Canadians need to know today whether the Conservatives will implement measures to address their needs; not tomorrow, not next week, not in a month. The Conservatives have to come up with a solution today to help Canadian pensioners.

Will they, yes or no, help us effective today, save the pensions of employees in private companies? Pensioners are listening to us. They are expecting clear and precise answers for saving their pension. What is the government's response? What is the response to saving the pensions of these people who worked so hard for our country?

• (1445)

[English]

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the issue of pensions, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance has travelled the country over the course of the summer talking to pensioners and to people about how to improve the system.

We have taken action. Earlier this year we doubled the time required for solvency payments for federally regulated plans. We are helping to protect pensioners by requiring companies to fully fund pension benefits on planned termination.

Oral Questions

I will just quote the member for Markham—Unionville about the Liberal plan. He said, “The Liberals don't actually have a policy on pension reform”.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has a proven track record in providing opportunities for young people. Aboriginal youth, in particular, are one of the fastest growing and youngest population groups in our country.

Could the Minister of Canadian Heritage please tell this House about a new announcement that will directly improve the lives of thousands of young people and improve the communities in which these young people and their families live?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know this issue is of great concern to my colleague from Peace River, who has over 30 aboriginal communities in his constituency.

Today I am pleased to announce that our government has renewed funding for the Urban Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centres initiative. It is a \$150 million initiative. More important than just the renewal of this, we are renewing this fund for six years, which means that this important aboriginal youth program will be on stable footing financially until the year 2015. This program supports over 40,000 aboriginal youth in 149 communities across the country.

I know there are a lot of aboriginal leaders who are here in Ottawa today lobbying members of Parliament. I thank them for their hard work.

* * *

POVERTY

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hunger count on the number of people using food banks is out and the figures are numbing: an 18% increase nationally and a whopping 61% in Alberta. One in ten people is using a food bank for the first time and only one in five people has a job. Thirty-seven per cent of food bank recipients are children.

When will the government get its head out of the sand, stop passing the buck and give Canada the leadership it needs for a national poverty plan?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since we took office, we have been working very hard to help Canadians get out of poverty and we have results.

Through our working income tax benefit, we helped 900,000 people in just the first year. When we went to enhance that, the opposition voted against it.

We have also lowered taxes, particularly for the lower income brackets. We have lifted some 85,000 seniors off the tax rolls now so they have money in their pockets. We have taken some 28,000 families and 60,000 children off the welfare lines.

We are getting the job done.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the numbers tell a different story. People are dropping off EI and on to welfare. Seventy-two thousand people came to a food bank for the first time, some with jobs that do not pay enough or with inadequate disability or pension supports.

Under international law, freedom from poverty is a human right but not here in Canada.

I have a simple question. Where is the leadership for a national poverty plan?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in our economic action plan, we had several factors to protect jobs and to create jobs for Canadians so they would not need food banks.

We have invested significantly in infrastructure. We have provided extended benefits for employment insurance and have made it easier to get for a longer period of time.

Unfortunately, the leadership of which the hon. member is speaking is sadly lacking in his party because his party voted against every one of these initiatives that would help beleaguered Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, less than a year ago, the Conservative member for Lévis—Bellechasse was so sure that the future of the Lévis shipyard was bright. However, we have just learned that it posted a \$6.3 million loss for the most recent quarter, that the Davie yard will have a hard time covering its costs for the coming year, and that a client of the shipyard is still waiting on support from EDC for a \$100 million loan.

Can the government give us the facts and tell us whether EDC will guarantee the loan?

• (1450)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois has no business lecturing us on this subject.

The Davie yard was in a difficult position. We made a decision and showed leadership, and EDC did support the Davie yard.

Nothing the Bloc does, or rather, is incapable of doing, will help the Davie shipyard survive. Their ideas are preposterous.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's shipyards are struggling to overcome two obstacles. First, they have to contend with the travel expenses policy that applies to the federal government's restoration projects, and second, they have to compete with foreign companies that receive more support from their respective governments.

When will the government recognize that we need a proper shipbuilding policy to prevent job losses in this sector?

Oral Questions

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has shown unprecedented leadership. I have met with people from the Davie shipyard, and they are very happy with the work the member for Lévis—Bellechasse has done on this file since the very beginning. It makes me laugh to see the member for Québec stand up and ask such ridiculous questions.

I would add that the people down the road in Rivière-du-Loup have also recognized that the government has kept its promises.

* * *

[English]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada performance report is a shockingly sad commentary on the minister's performance.

While hog producers are facing their worst crisis ever, hundreds leaving the farms, with beef producers facing the lowest prices in decades due in great part to the government's inaction on challenging the United States' country of origin labelling, the minister cuts back on farm income support by \$961,400,000.

How can the minister be so heartless as to cut \$1 billion from farmers in their time of need?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Malpeque has rattled around the back benches in this place for almost two decades. Even he should know that program spending in agriculture varies from year to year.

We were very fortunate last year that the grains and oilseeds sectors did exceptionally well but we are not resting on our laurels—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Gerry Ritz: —or lawyers either for that matter, Mr. Speaker, they are just not dependable at all.

We are out there opening trade corridors. We are ensuring those products are moving in an expeditious way and getting returns back to the farm gate where they should be.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, maybe the Minister of Agriculture should face some of the hog producers and give that answer to those who are going broke, losing their homes and losing their land. That answer is unacceptable.

Let us be clear. The minister pretends he stands behind farmers but his is a record of failure. Of all the cruel hoaxes perpetuated by the government, the Minister of Agriculture's hoax is the worst. He is imposing an absolute cruelty on producers in this country.

Will he commit today to re-profile the \$1 billion that his department misspent to producers?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member gets louder and redder, what he is forgetting is that producers themselves have tremendous support for this government. Let me quote a few of them. Curtiss Littlejohn with Ontario Pork

said, “These three programs provide options and choices for producers and ultimately will help to right-size the industry”. The president of the pork producers said, “We think it's going to make a huge difference.... The loans will give some farmers the liquidity they need to stay in business...”.

We are delivering the right programs at the right time to make sure our industry survives in spite of the member for Malpeque and his band of merry farmers who vote against all these programs.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, an international watchdog has ranked Afghanistan as the second most corrupt country in the world. It also happens to be the largest recipient of our foreign aid.

What is the government doing to ensure that Canadian taxpayer money we send to Afghanistan is being spent properly on aid and not ending up in the pockets of the corrupt? Are there any checks and balances, and if so, what are they?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has expressed its support to Afghanistan in that country's efforts to tackle corruption at all levels. Wide-scale corruption, as we know, hinders economic growth and good governance and engenders distrust between the people and the government.

I would remind the House that the Minister of National Defence has spoken eloquently and firmly in cautioning and urging the government of Afghanistan to crack down on corruption.

• (1455)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Brown has said that the U.K. will begin withdrawing troops from Afghanistan in 2010. For his part, President Obama has sent his advisers back to the drawing board and has asked the U.S. military to come up with a plan that includes an exit strategy. Here, our own top military commander, General Natynczyk, has begun organizing our scheduled pullout.

Why then is our defence minister publicly musing about continuing Canada's military mission? Is the minister at odds with the military leadership, or will he once and for all confirm that Canada will withdraw all its troops in 2011?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows well, Canada has been engaged in a full range of military operations while at the same time taking a whole-of-government approach that has been quite effective. General McChrystal, whom I met with recently, in fact put a seal of approval on the approach that Canada has taken.

With respect to military combat operations, they will end in 2011. The Prime Minister has been clear on that. Other ministers of this government have stated so emphatically. I do not know what part of “the military mission will end in 2011” the hon. member does not understand.

*Oral Questions***INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the government tabled new legislation to implement the Canada-Jordan free trade agreement. This agreement will create new opportunities for Canadian exporters so they can create new jobs here at home.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade please tell the House why this agreement is so important for Canada?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the potential here for jobs and opportunities is exponential. The best example is to look at how the United States was doing before it signed its free trade agreement with Jordan. It was doing 200 million dollars' worth of trade. Today it is doing two billion dollars' worth of trade.

This agreement would mean increased jobs for Canadian workers and increased opportunity for Canadian consumers.

* * *

[Translation]

MUSEUMS

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the employees of the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Canadian War Museum have been on strike for eight weeks. We are talking about eight weeks. These employees play a crucial role in protecting and interpreting our heritage, but that is not important to the Conservatives. Many events have been cancelled and programs set aside, but that, too, is unimportant. There is no agreement in sight. The parties are deadlocked, and the government is doing nothing.

Is the government doing nothing because it does not understand the importance of culture or because it could not care less about it?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact our mediator has been working with the parties since before the strike began. We will continue to encourage both sides to come to the table and find a resolution as soon as possible. I stand ready to appoint an arbitrator, but unfortunately at this time, neither of the parties agrees to that.

* * *

[Translation]

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Nicolas Dufour (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, colleges and CEGEPs are calling for more federal money to support their research activities. The government has to realize that transfers for post-secondary education are still below 1994-95 levels. The annual shortfall is \$3.4 billion for Canada and nearly \$800 million for Quebec.

When will this government stop holding up research in post-secondary institutions and restore their funding?

[English]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to give the member opposite some facts. This government, through our economic action plan, has actually invested \$684 million in research and training infrastructure at Canadian colleges. With matched funding, that is over \$1.6 billion in infrastructure money.

Our government entertained very extensive prebudget consultations last year. We intend to do exactly that this year. We are willing to work with the colleges on the next programs. I hope that the Bloc votes for it this time.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today the government may have woken up to the issues facing urban aboriginal youth, but what about the friendship centres that house these programs? Friendship centres deliver programs that are community based, accessible and culturally relevant, and they improve the lives of the people who use them.

However, the government has not renewed the funding they need to operate, and once again they are left waiting. Will the minister announce renewed funding and enhancements for friendship centres across Canada?

● (1500)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are showing strong support for aboriginal youth across this country and for aboriginal friendship centres, of which there are 117 across the country.

I know the value of these friendship centres, the largest of which is in Prince George. When I did my undergraduate studies, there were hundreds of aboriginal students who went to the University of Northern British Columbia. They could not have gone to university if they did not have the support of those friendship centres.

They gave poor aboriginals who were coming into city centres an opportunity to get a university education. From New Aiyansh to Williams Lake and Prince George, we are showing our support. We are going to continue to do so. We have invested record amounts to support aboriginal youth, and this Conservative government will continue to lead.

* * *

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today's release of Transparency International's 2009 report points toward our government's hard work at improving accountability and transparency.

Could the Minister of State for Democratic Reform please share with the House his views of the report and what it means for our government?

Government Orders

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Transparency International said in its report that Canada is an inspiration for the United States and other countries in the Americas. It went on to say that Canada's is the cleanest government in the western hemisphere and in the G7.

It said that since our government has taken office, we have moved from 14th to 8th place in world rankings. This means that our government's actions on transparency and accountability are working. We will continue to work hard on transparency and accountability.

* * *

MUSEUMS

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, either the Conservatives do not understand culture or they do not care. It is one or the other. Employees of two national museums have been on strike for eight weeks. The government has been completely invisible on this file, and the Minister of Labour must explain why.

I will make it very simple for her. I will offer her a choice of answers: she chose to do nothing; she tried something but failed; she does not even know what I am talking about.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, we have been working with both parties since before the strike began and, in fact, for quite some time. This is a very difficult situation for both parties. We encourage them to come back to the table as soon as possible to find a resolution.

As I indicated, I am prepared to appoint an arbitrator, but unfortunately at this time, neither of the parties will agree to that.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Marilyn More, Minister of Education and Minister of Labour and Workforce Development for Nova Scotia.

I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the recipients of the 2010 National Aboriginal Achievement Awards: William Commanda, Skawenni:io Barnes, Doug Henry, Danny Beaton, Edith Cloutier, Tom Crane Bear, Kenneth Deer, Madeleine Dion Stout, Dr. Raoul J. MacKay, Ellen Melcosky, Monica Pinette, Kananginak Pootoogook, Eric William Robinson, and Donald Worme.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

ECONOMIC RECOVERY ACT (STIMULUS)

The House resumed from November 16 consideration of the motion that Bill C-51, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on January 27, 2009 and to implement other measures, be read the third time and passed.

The Speaker: It being 3 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at the third reading stage of Bill C-51.

Call in the members.

● (1510)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 128*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Aglukkaq	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
André	Angus
Arthur	Ashfield
Ashton	Bachand
Baird	Beaudin
Bellavance	Bernier
Bezan	Bigras
Blackburn	Blais
Blaney	Block
Bonsant	Bouchard
Boucher	Boughen
Bourgeois	Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge	Brunelle
Cadman	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Carrie	Casson
Charlton	Chong
Chow	Christopherson
Comartin	Crowder
Cullen	Cummins
Davidson	Davies (Vancouver East)
DeBellefeuille	Dechert
Del Mastro	Demers
Desnoyers	Devolin
Dewar	Dorion
Duceppe	Dufour
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dykstra
Faille	Fast
Finley	Flaherty
Fletcher	Gagnon
Galipeau	Gallant
Godin	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde
Gravelle	Guergis
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	
Harris (St. John's East)	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hiebert
Hill	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
Hughes	Hyer
Jean	Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laforest	Laframboise
Lake	Lauzon
Lavallée	Lebel
Lemay	Lemieux
Leslie	Lessard
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunn	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	Malo
Maloway	Mark
Marston	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Mathysen	Mayes
McLeod	Menzies
Merrifield	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Mulcair
Nadeau	Nicholson

Points of Order

O'Connor	O'Neill-Gordon
Ouellet	Pailé
Paquette	Paradis
Petit	Plamondon
Poillievre	Pomerleau
Preston	Rafferty
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Richards	Richardson
Ritz	Roy
Savoie	Saxton
Scheer	Schellenberger
Shea	Shipley
Siksay	Smith
Sorenson	St-Cyr
Stoffer	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Thi Lac	Thibeault
Thompson	Tilson
Toews	Trost
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Vincent	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Wasylcia-Leis	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young — 184

NAYS

Members

Andrews	Bains
Bélanger	Bennett
Bevilacqua	Brisson
Byrne	Cannis
Coderre	Cotler
Crombie	Cuzner
D'Amours	Dhaliwal
Dion	Dosanjh
Dryden	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter	Eyking
Folco	Foote
Garneau	Goodale
Guarnieri	Hall Findlay
Ignatieff	Jennings
Karygiannis	Kennedy
LeBlanc	Lee
Malhi	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
McCallum	McGuinity
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Mendes
Minna	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Murray
Neville	Patry
Proulx	Rae
Ratansi	Regan
Rodriguez	Rota
Savage	Scarpaleggia
Sgro	Silva
Simms	Simson
Szabo	Tonks
Trudeau	Volpe
Wrzesnewskyj	Zarac — 62

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

[*English*]

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded division, government orders will be extended by eight minutes.

POINTS OF ORDER

REMARKS BY MEMBER FOR SCARBOROUGH SOUTHWEST

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am in fact saddened to rise on this point of order because I had hoped members in the House would not sink to this level. However, this morning the member for Scarborough Southwest made an entry on Twitter that I find particularly demeaning, discriminatory and unbecoming of a member of Parliament.

This morning, in the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, I had to put up with the abhorrent behaviour of a partisan chair, who pays no attention to the rules governing parliamentary committees whatsoever. However, during that meeting, I provided the respect that each member is due.

The member for Scarborough Southwest wrote on her Twitter, and I apologize as I will have to use my name, “In committee this morning, M.P. Del Mastro should grow up (not out)”. I hear some people in the House laughing and that is unfortunate. I apologize for not being perfect and perhaps my stature does not meet the criteria that some members in the House set, but I have battled that problem since birth. I apologize for not actually fitting into the requirements.

I still hear the chastising going on. It is this kind of arrogance and elitism that will be the downfall of the Liberal Party if this continues. I am giving the member the opportunity to apologize. The actions of the members in committee this morning do nothing to discourage me. They only encourage me.

I would ask the member to take the opportunity to apologize for what she wrote. She may wish to consider that a number of her own constituents are less than perfect and she represents them as well.

• (1515)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of the member, the lion's share of the quips and giggles were coming from his side of the House.

Mrs. Michelle Simson (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I, too, sat through the committee meeting today and listened to a great deal of disparaging remarks about myself and my party.

That said, if there is anything I said that offended the member, I am sorry. To say one should grow up and not out was out of line and I do apologize. Growing up and growing out is not something I should have said to the hon. member.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad the hon. colleague has apologized. However, I think it speaks to a bigger issue.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, but this is not a clown show. We are elected to represent our people. We go to committee to do serious business. I believe the issue of members sitting on committee with their inane Twitters about what happens at committee demeans the work of all parliamentarians. I am not going to speak on this party or that party. We have an obligation to represent the best of our country and I would like members of Parliament to put the inane little games away and get down to business of serving their constituents.

Government Orders

When I saw that Twitter, I was appalled because I thought it could happen at any of our committees. I am asking all—

The Speaker: Order, please. I think the point of order has been dealt with. Perhaps we could move on to orders of the day at this point.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Colombia and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to join other members of my caucus and our party's trade critic, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, in voicing my strong opposition to Bill C-23.

It would be extremely irresponsible for the government to push for the passage of this free trade agreement with Colombia, a country with the worst human rights record by far in the western hemisphere and that is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for trade unionists.

The Conservatives' claim that trade will bring human rights improvements to Colombia is entirely contradicted not just by the facts I will raise in my address today, but also by the text of the agreement.

The full respect of fundamental human rights must be a precondition for any trade agreement. Before going into the facts of the argument, let us first trace the government actions that have led us to where we are today.

On November 21, 2008 Canada signed a free trade agreement and related side agreements with Colombia, the result of a year and a half of trade negotiations. The bill would legislate the implementation of the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, also known as the CCFTA.

The agreement consists of three parts: the main FTA text, a labour side agreement and an environmental protection side agreement.

It is nearly identical to Bill C-24, the implementation legislation for the Canada-Peru free trade agreement.

In June of this year, the New Democrats, with the support of the Bloc members, and joined by the trade union movement and civil society, successfully prevented Bill C-23 from completing second reading.

At that time, New Democrats presented a subamendment to the Bloc motion on Bill C-23, asking that the House decline to give second reading to Bill C-23 because the government had concluded

the Canada-Colombia FTA while the committee was still considering the matter.

Over the course of the debate on Bill C-23, our caucus critic has continued to work tirelessly with a large network of civil society groups, trade unions, lawyers, environmental groups, parliamentarians, members of the Colombian congress and concerned citizens to raise awareness and, ultimately, to stop this agreement.

In 2008 the critic travelled to Colombia with the standing committee to meet directly with stakeholders and opponents of this deal.

Various motions have been presented at committee to study the issue in depth and to stop this flawed deal. Petitions have been, and are being, circulated. To date our caucus has received almost 3,000 signatures from Canadians all across Canada who do not support the government's desire to put this agreement into action.

Now that we have looked at how we got here, let us go over the main flaws in the agreement and some facts about the current situation in Colombia.

The most appalling aspects of the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement are the following.

First and foremost, this agreement fails due to its lack of labour rights protection. Colombia is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for trade unionists. They are regularly victims of violence, intimidation and assassination by paramilitary groups. In fact, 2,690 trade unionists have been murdered in Colombia since 1986.

In 2008, the number of murders went up by 18% over the previous year. What is even more alarming, as we discuss this agreement, is that since September of this year, 27 trade unionists have been murdered.

Some important facts about the Colombian government of President Alvaro Uribe are as follows. Uribe's government has been accused by international human rights organizations of corruption, electoral fraud, complicity in extrajudicial killings by the army, links to paramilitary and right wing death squads; and of using the security forces to spy on the supreme court of Colombia, opposition politicians, government politicians and journalists.

Many government members, including ministers and members of the president's family, have been forced to resign or have been arrested in relation to many of these issues.

● (1520)

With this type of reality in Colombia, it is clear that the agreement, in its current form, does not include strong enough labour standards. The division of labour provisions in the main text of the agreement, in addition to not having any substantial enforcement mechanism, will do nothing to encourage Colombia to improve its horrendous human rights situation for workers.

Government Orders

In fact, in its current form, the agreement could justify the use of violence in many cases. For example, in the agreement, the penalty for non-compliance is currently determined by a review panel, one that has the power to require the offending country to pay up to \$15 million annually into a cooperation fund. Unfortunately, this type of enforcement measure will do little to encourage the government to change its current approach to trade unionists. If and when a trade unionist is killed, under this provision, all the government is required to do is to pay into a development fund, capped at \$15 million per year, essentially equating the murder of a trade unionist to paying a fine. That is shameful.

The second way in which this agreement fails is in its lack of environmental protection. Environmental issues are addressed in a side agreement, this time with no enforcement mechanism to force Canada or Colombia to respect environmental rights.

Here is a fact. Nearly 200,000 hectares of natural forest in Colombia are lost every year due to agriculture, logging, mining, energy development and construction. Another fact is that almost 4 million people in Colombia are internally displaced persons, 60% of whom have come from regions where there is a rich supply of minerals, agriculture and economic resources. In these areas, private companies and their government and paramilitary supporters have come in and forced individuals and local communities from their homes.

The side agreement process has serious flaws. In the past we have witnessed how these side agreements are unenforceable. For example, in the case of NAFTA, not a single successful suit has been brought forward under the labour side agreement.

The third major flaw in this agreement is found in the investor chapter. Copied from NAFTA's chapter 11 on investor rights, the CCFTA provides powerful rights to private companies. The provisions in this chapter give private companies the ability to sue governments, as is enforceable through investor state arbitration panels. The arbitration system set up by the investor chapter gives foreign companies the ability to challenge legitimate Canadian environmental, labour and social protections. This is not a standard that we accept.

The fourth most shameful aspect of this agreement relates to agricultural tariffs. Colombia's poverty is directly linked to agricultural development. In fact, 22% of Colombia's employment is in the agricultural sector. An end to tariffs on Canadian cereals, pork and beef will result in the flooding of the local market with cheaper products. This would ultimately lead to thousands of lost jobs and to more poverty.

In conclusion, Canada needs to set the example. It would be highly irresponsible to turn a blind eye to the Colombian situation. We cannot allow Canada to abandon its values and its support for internationally recognized human rights to gain economic advantage for our companies at the expense of millions of displaced and impoverished Colombians.

Let us remember Jorge Darío Hoyos Franco, the prominent union leader who was gunned down near his home in southeast Bogota on March 3, 2001, a year before President Uribe was elected to his first of two terms in power. In the words of his daughter, Yessika

Morales, "You cannot give a reward before he", meaning President Uribe, "fulfills his duty of improving human rights. This is like a father continuing to reward a child when he misbehaves, so that child will never change his conduct".

I call on all parliamentarians to join me and my caucus in our strong opposition to Bill C-23.

• (1525)

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, did I just hear the member say that one of the main reasons the NDP is opposing this is that it will give opportunities to Canadian farmers to access markets in Colombia? He just said that a couple of minutes ago.

I stopped what I was doing, because I think this explains why the NDP has so far removed itself from its grassroots. At one time it used to be a rural party representing rural areas and said that it represented farmers. Now we understand why it does not get support across the rural areas of this country.

He stood up and actually said that the NDP was opposing this bill because it would allow Canadian products to go into Colombia's markets as a result of the tariffs and barriers coming down. Does he not understand even the basics of free trade, that those Colombian farmers would have opportunities to come into our markets as well?

It is hard to believe that the day has come when the NDP is actively opposing Canadian farmers in the interests of its ideology.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the member does not want to bring up any of the bad things about this bill. We can look past the 2,690 trade unionists who were actually murdered in that country. We can look past the poverty and the environmental damage. They do not matter.

We could create a few jobs, but the unfortunate thing with this bill is that it does not do anything for fair trade, and that is what the New Democrats are talking about: fair trade, not free trade.

• (1530)

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that there are two side agreements in this trade agreement, one being environmental and the other dealing with human rights. I am wondering why these two agreements are side agreements and not in the main text of the agreement, which would give them more power to be enforced and more moral power.

I was just wondering if the hon. member for Sudbury would be interested in maybe commenting on why he thinks these are side agreements as opposed to being put into the body of the text.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, I could only imagine the reasons the Conservative government would not want to put the environment and human rights into the main portion of this free trade agreement.

Government Orders

As I mentioned earlier, what we are advocating is fair trade, fair trade with countries that we can actually deal with, and that we ensure that we have fair environmental practices and fair human rights. Right now this bill does not present any of that in the way it is presented.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise here this afternoon to resume debate on the motion put forward by my colleague, the hon. member for Sherbrooke, to amend Bill C-23, Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act.

I would like to begin by thanking the hon. member for Sherbrooke and congratulating him on his fine work. Throughout this debate he has been able to point to those parts of the agreement where important questions remain regarding its fairness, of course, but also regarding the real motivation behind the implementation of this proposed new free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia.

However, as I was saying, this debate is not about the bill itself, but rather the amendment put forward by my hon. colleague from Sherbrooke. Regarding this amendment, I wonder why the government would disagree with it, since the amendment does not change the substance of the bill, but the nature of the debate proceedings.

At this point in my speech, I would like to read the amendment. Then, I will explain why the government could very well support it. The amendment says:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

"the House decline to give second reading to Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Colombia and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, because the government concluded this agreement while the Standing Committee on International Trade was considering the matter, thereby demonstrating its disrespect for democratic institutions."

Members will recall that, in the summer of 2008, the Prime Minister declared that an election was necessary because Parliament had become dysfunctional, committees were no longer able to conduct their business properly and that there was a lack of respect for the institutions of Parliament.

I am wondering, given that the Prime Minister himself seems so interested in the democratic nature of standing committees, why his government decided to introduce a bill to have this House study the matter while a parliamentary committee was examining it.

We know very well how our parliamentary committees work and how the agendas for these committees are established. Usually, the agenda is set by the members of the steering committee, which includes members of the opposition as well as government members.

How is it that government members decided to put a future Canada-Colombia free trade agreement on the agenda of the standing committee knowing very well that, in the back of its mind, the government intended to ignore the committee's work and to introduce in the House a bill to examine this very issue?

When these members informed the other committee members that they would support the study of this issue, did they realize the

importance of the committee's work and the fact that this committee's findings could enlighten the government on a future bill?

• (1535)

It seems that would be obvious and that there is a process set up. When this issue was before the committee, the government members could very well have explained to government officials how the committee would be examining this issue. Now, it appears as though they were talking out of both sides of their mouths, since the committee had decided to examine this issue and to make some recommendations to the government.

As I said earlier, if the Prime Minister really had respect for the way committees work, he himself would have allowed the committee to do its work and reach its own conclusions so as to give the government a new perspective before it drafted its bill.

For these reasons, I think my colleague from Sherbrooke was absolutely right to introduce this amendment, which states that we should set aside this bill, and that we should decline to give second reading, so that the committee can continue its work. In fact, the committee is working as we speak.

I want to thank my colleague from Sherbrooke for inviting me to join him during some of the committee sessions so that I could hear for myself what some of the representatives and witnesses had to say. By the way, those witnesses had been invited by the government, when my colleague invited me to join him. The witness I am referring to seemed, in the case of the free trade agreement between Canada and the United States, to assure us that that free trade agreement would also be beneficial to Colombia.

It should come as no surprise that we have some reservations about this issue since we do not have many figures on trade between Canada and Colombia. We can all agree that current trade between Canada and Colombia is quite limited. In our opinion, the government is thinking about establishing a new trade regime between Canada and Colombia not because it has trade in mind, but because of certain interests, which could hinder efforts by the Colombian government and Colombian civil society to adopt better practices with respect to the environment and the rights of workers.

In closing, I would like to remind hon. members that the other point this witness wanted to make addressed the competitiveness we should maintain with respect to the United States. However, when it comes to international trade, Quebec and Canada have a very different attitude from the United States. Competitiveness must not be the only consideration in establishing a free trade agreement between Canada and another country.

• (1540)

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will take this opportunity to congratulate my colleague from Verchères—Les Patriotes, who has worked so hard on this file.

Government Orders

It is understandable because this is an important cause. At the moment people are changing their minds about agreements. On the weekend I was with a delegation from Mexico which is questioning certain parts of the agreement. This is surprising because the parts at issue in NAFTA are the ones defended by the bill introduced by the present Conservative government.

I would like to ask my colleague from Verchères—Les Patriotes whether he believes that this ploy in committee to hasten the passage of this bill does not stem from the fact that certain groups are pressuring the Conservative government to protect certain interests. They are attempting an ideological ploy to speed up the passage of this bill.

Mr. Luc Malo: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Brome—Missisquoi for his question.

What he is in fact advancing is the following question. Is the government vulnerable to lobby groups that might urge it to cut corners, to rush the work and speed up the process, even if it means an imperfect agreement, an agreement that could have adverse effects in future?

This is a very important question, because what is expected of a responsible government, a government that does its job thoroughly, is that it pay no heed to all of these lobbies demanding that the process be accelerated, and that it take into consideration all interests and the informative perspective of a parliamentary committee, such as the Standing Committee on International Trade. That committee too may, in the exercise of its duties, invite experts from all over who have different and diverging points of view. What moves the debate ahead is having opinions that are sometimes contradictory. However, my colleague makes a good point. The government should not rush into anything to benefit special interests.

[*English*]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member to expand a little on the issue of the committee's work being ignored.

I was here when the Conservatives were in opposition and said that the government needed to listen to the majority of Parliament as that was a priority for any government, particularly in a minority situation. Here the Conservatives are acting in exactly the opposite way.

I thought the member made a good point. I wonder if he could expand on what it says about the government when it wants to have it both ways. When the Conservatives were in opposition in a minority government they felt that the majority ruled, but now that they are in power in a minority government, they think it does not really matter what the majority thinks and that it only matters what the Conservatives think.

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

The example he gave is entirely to the point. One could mention many others, for example the government's decision to reduce the funding needed by the Parliamentary Budget Officer to do his work.

There is also the government's refusal to say whether it will act on the Supreme Court's directive regarding the repatriation of Omar Khadr, that is, whether or not it will respect the court's decision. One might also think of what happened in the last Parliament. For example, there was a vote on the implementation of the Kyoto protocol and the majority of members of this House voted in favour, but the government had decided, on the pretext that it was the government, not to heed the majority voice of this House.

These are all examples that tend to prove that the government is in agreement with democratic institutions when it is in its interest to be in agreement, and does as it pleases when it is not in its interest.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate on the bill to implement the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement.

I have criticized this agreement, and the fact that I am going to continue to do so will not come as a surprise to anyone. Just because it is a free trade agreement does not mean it is the be all and the end all. The Conservative Party and the Liberal Party have a tendency to say that an economic agreement takes precedence over everything else, and that it is very important to ratify such a treaty. However, the case before us is a completely different matter. People who are watching this debate must realize that the free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia presents some serious risks, and I will mention a few.

There is the possibility that investors may sue the Colombian government if they feel that their performance in that country is affected by various measures implemented by the government. That is very dangerous, because this would impede social development in a country like Colombia. Any investor—whether he is Canadian, British or American—who has interests in Colombia, could blame the government for putting forward measures to protect workers or young working children, among other things. This could be dangerous, because investors could claim that such measures are affecting their performance and they could sue the Colombian government to oppose such legislation.

Colombia is already a poor country led by a “narco-government” that is controlled by drug cartels. There is a tremendous risk that initiatives designed to improve people's working conditions will be adversely affected by this bill.

In order to follow a democratic process, Canada first signed a free trade agreement with the United States, and then another one with Mexico and the United States. These countries are democracies that have safeguards to prevent such agreements from impeding progress in terms of people's quality of life.

The free trade agreements signed by Canada with the United States and Mexico include provisions to that effect, but in this case, there are fewer of them. The government said it was important to address the issue and sign a free trade agreement with Colombia, adding that it would enter side agreements on working conditions and the environment.

Government Orders

However, we know what side agreements imply. Once the official agreement has been ratified, they will find excuses to delay the negotiation of those side agreements. They will impose very small fines that will do nothing to prevent abuse of workers or of children, but that will hurt the social initiatives designed to improve people's quality of life.

This is a great danger which is not posed by other free trade agreements. Free trade agreements are often entered into with countries with a comparable economy and a legitimate democracy. This is absolutely not the case with Colombia.

Speaking of democracy, 30 members of the Colombian parliament are under arrest, and some 60 are under investigation. There is complicity with drug traffickers, who gain a foothold with the government by buying MPs and senators. Some will say that this happens in Canada and everywhere else. I will concede that, in part, except that down there this seems to be the preferred method of operating.

• (1550)

God knows the drug traffickers have an immense amount of money to make available to those who agree to work in a negative fashion as elected officials. It is easy for those people to agree to certain things. The evidence is that some of them are now under arrest and others under investigation. What is more, there is their possible complicity with the paramilitary groups that are to some extent the law in Colombia. This is a very unstable country in terms of working conditions, living conditions and the status of democracy.

Will this agreement enable this country to evolve? If Colombia signs an agreement with Canada, will it conform to international standards? Given the current state of affairs, we doubt it.

I leave aside the fact that the standing committee did excellent work in trying to get to the bottom of things, and that the government totally ignored it in an attempt to impose its will on the Parliament of Canada. I concur with my colleagues who say that the government is moving too fast. It makes no sense. This needs serious reflection. Problems are not going to be resolved just by signing a free trade agreement. On the contrary, what the Canadian government is doing at the moment may aggravate those problems.

I can give some examples of democratic problems. Unionists are disappearing down there. They are being killed and executed. The union should be regarded as anti-establishment. When the authority in the Colombian parliament is corrupt, people in civil society rise up, and the unionists are often the first to do so. I could talk about this at length, being a former unionist myself. For me, the union has always been anti-establishment. It is important to have the unions' viewpoint in a free and democratic society. But when they are condemned to silence, when an attempt is made to keep them quiet, when no effort is made to improve the working conditions of Colombian workers and the government interferes, major problems arise. This is what we are trying to denounce as responsible members of Parliament here.

The same applies for the people's quality of life. In Colombia children are permitted to work. We do not permit this in Canada. Or we permit it, but under certain conditions. The children must not be too young. If the Colombian government decided to put a stop to

children working in companies, the companies might threaten the government with prosecution because their investments and their performance would be jeopardized. As I was saying, these are not incentives to social progress.

We are seeing population displacements in Colombia. We are seeing big agricultural consortiums tell small farmers to get out, whereupon they take their land, often with the help of the paramilitary who have an almost direct relationship with the government. The government knows what is going on. It lets it go on. It sees to it that the big consortiums are able to control the situation, and they are pushing more and more people out.

It is the same thing with the mining companies. They may decide to expropriate people to get big expanses of farmland in different provinces of Colombia, because they consider it important to do this on the pretext that they are investors and they are going to attract Canadian, British or American investment to Colombia.

In this way entire populations are displaced.

We are not against this agreement because we have to be against it or we like being against it. Moreover, I would remind hon. members that free trade has always been a very important issue in Quebec and that Quebec succeeded in winning acceptance for the free trade agreement between Canada and the United States when the rest of Canada had misgivings about it. When we object to something, it is because we have good reasons to do so.

I invite my colleagues to vote against this agreement, because it will not help Colombia any more than it will help Canada, which is supposed to be a defender of human rights.

• (1555)

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last year, in 2008, the House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade recommended that no agreement be signed with Colombia until the human rights situation there was improved and also that a human rights impact assessment be undertaken to determine the real impact of the trade agreement.

At that time, the Liberals and the Liberal critic on the committee appeared to be supportive of that idea. Now over the course of the year, evidently, the Liberal position has changed and the new critic, the member for Kings—Hants, after a four day trip to Colombia made the following statement on September 30 regarding Colombia. He said:

To say that paramilitary forces are murdering union leaders today is false, because everybody who has been studying the issue recognizes that the paramilitary forces have been disbanded—

Of course, that is totally contradicted by a report from Amnesty International which found that paramilitary groups remained active despite claims by the government that all paramilitaries had been demobilized in a government-sponsored process that began in 2003. Paramilitaries continued to kill civilians and to commit other human rights violations, sometimes with the support or acquiescence of the security forces.

Government Orders

The question is, how did the member for Kings—Hants get this so wrong and has the member apologized to the organizations that have approached him for an apology on this issue?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

We are talking about a time when the Liberal Party hoped to come to power. This is not the only example of major shifts by the Liberal Party. I remember hearing the Liberals and their national defence critic say for a year that the mission in Afghanistan would not be extended because what was happening there was terrible, we had done our part and we were going to leave the country.

A year later, when the polls were good, that party flip-flopped, got into bed with the Conservatives and decided to extend the mission until 2011. This is not the first time the Liberals have done this. In my opinion, the Liberals are guilty. Instead of taking a consistent stand, they will say one thing for a while. Then, when they feel that power is within their reach, they change their tune because they can picture themselves in power. They want power.

The Conservatives have also done this. When they were on this side of the House, the Conservatives criticized the government. But today, they are the first ones to do the very things they used to condemn. The Liberals and the Conservatives are just the same. They are two of a kind.

• (1600)

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the hon. member for Saint-Jean for his interesting speech.

I would like to ask him a question since he is the Bloc Québécois national defence critic. I know he is an expert on the subject. When I was listening to his comments, I saw many similarities with Afghanistan. There is institutionalized corruption, problems, the democratic deficit, drugs, poppies, which are a major problem. I now see parallels with Colombia.

How can we conduct trade with people who have problems similar to those we are trying to overcome in Afghanistan? Does he not see a parallel between these two situations?

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from Trois-Rivières.

She is quite right in what she says. I would say, when talking about drugs, that the similarities are quite stupefying. Yes, there is corruption in Colombia. Yes, it is a narco-state. Yes, the drug cartel is in control. We will not be helping the people of Colombia and international rights by signing an agreement with those people.

Usually, membership in important forums, such as NATO, the UN or the European Union, is contingent upon conduct that is close to that of a democracy. By intentionally ignoring this, we are not contributing to the advancement of the Colombian population or international law. So yes, there are similarities.

At present, we are having a great deal of trouble in Afghanistan, which can be easily traced to the opium trade. The same goes for Colombia. We should not agree to sign an agreement with Colombia until positive changes occur.

[*English*]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join the debate and to put my feelings on the record.

At the outset, all the bad things that have been said are bad, but it is disheartening to think about Canada going down this road. I hearken back to my time in the Ontario Legislature, where I watched the Mike Harris government, over the course of eight years, destroy so much of what made me so proud to be a Hamiltonian, and particularly the things that were built over decades and generations before. It will take another decade or so to catch up to where we were in many of those areas.

I raise that because not only is the agenda similar, but the players are similar. The chief of staff to the Prime Minister is the former chief of staff to Mike Harris. The finance minister is the same finance minister I watched in the Ontario Legislature. It is the same with the transport minister and a couple of other players on that side of the House. As disheartening as that was to watch as a member of the provincial legislature, cherished programs and important legacies destroyed, I now see the same thing at the national level. Much of what makes us proud to be Canadians is on the line in terms of the government's action, and in particular, this bill.

Why is there so much opposition? The previous speaker said that he was not standing to oppose for the sake of opposing. Certainly, we are not. We are the party that is keeping Parliament alive. We are standing opposed to this because it is wrong. It is wrong for Colombians, but it is wrong for Canadians. It is wrong for Canadians to enter into an agreement that gives the impression that everything is okay in Colombia, that it is just business as usual. Well, it is not.

Just today there was a news conference reported in the *Latin American Herald Tribune*. It says in part:

Representatives of the Colombian Coalition against Torture held a press conference in Geneva to discuss the report the group is presenting this week before a U.N. rights panel here.

Torture continues to be generalized and systemic in Colombia. It is perpetrated by the Public Force, by the paramilitaries and by the guerillas, but the party principally responsible for these acts is the state", said Isabelle Heyer, a member of the Colombian Jurist Commission...

She said sexual violence against women and girls is one of the most pervasive modes of torture, calling it "an habitual, systemic and invisible practice, which enjoys impunity in the majority of cases and whose principal perpetrators are soldiers and police".

Is it not the same government that uses girls going to school in Afghanistan as their one reason for continuing with the mission in the format that it is? Yet we see what is going on with women and girls in Colombia, but somehow that does not count.

We have seen a lot of Canadian trade unionists getting involved in this issue. Do members think they have nothing else to concern themselves with? They stand for more than just collective bargaining and taking care of their members. They know when they build a stronger Canada, they are taking care of their members.

Government Orders

I was meeting earlier in my office on the Hill with some ACTRA representatives, as many members are. They are lobbying on some very important issues regarding Canadian culture and the importance of maintaining and reflecting that culture and ensuring there is regulations that it happens in our airwaves. It is an important matter. I happened to mention in passing that I would be getting up later to speak to the Colombian free trade agreement in the House, and members should have seen their reaction. They knew about it. They knew what was happening. That was not why they were there to see me. They were horrified by the prospect of Canada entering into such an agreement.

We met on the Hill with Colombian citizens, Colombian trade union leaders whose family members, friends and colleagues have been murdered. It is a narco-state. What the heck are we doing? Whose bidding are we taking care of by doing this? I have heard some nonsense from the official opposition that it is all about human rights. Give me a break.

● (1605)

Norway was all set to enter into a free trade agreement. It has pulled back. Why? It wants to see some improvement in human rights. Norway has taken our place as the leading nation in the world being seen as fair-minded, fighting for human rights, building a society that helps all its people. That is where we were. That is what Norway has done.

Britain was providing some military assistance. My understanding is it has pulled back on that also. Why? It cannot bear the thought that the actions it would take would lend credibility to what goes on in Colombia.

The United States of America, under George Bush, was gung-ho for this agreement. It had a slight change there. That slight change has brought this to a screeching halt. In fact, the chairman of the House trade working group and representative Phil Hare have attached themselves to the following quote:

If we had been born in Colombia, we would probably be dead. That's right. As members of our respective labour unions, the fight for higher wages, better working conditions, and a secure pension could have cost us our lives.

I am a trade unionist. My brother is a trade unionist. That applies to all of us.

Colombian Senator Robledo stated:

You can be sure of the fact that should this free trade agreement be ratified, Canada will become extremely unpopular and disliked by the people of Colombia.

Let us get a sense of this. The people who are known to be on the forefront of fighting for human rights in Canada and around the world, the trade union movement in Canada, are opposed to this. Trade union leaders, human rights activists and citizens and elected senators in Colombia do not want this to happen. The U.K. has pulled back from supporting Colombia. Norway has pulled back from its free trade agreement with Colombia because of human rights violations. The United States has stopped, at least for now. We do not know what the future holds, but for now it cannot get past the Democrats in Congress because of human rights violations.

Therefore, why are we doing this? It is hard not to think that, given the fact that the labour and environmental protections, and I use the word "protection" loosely, are in these side agreements. We

know from our own experience in NAFTA that a side agreement does not have the same impact as being in the main agreement. That would be why we put it in a side agreement.

Again, I come back to this question. Who wants this? Who benefits? It would seem that there are a lot of multinational corporations, many of them Canadian-based. We lead in resource extraction. Over the next few decades, they stand to make an awful lot of money if they can get into Colombia and start getting at those resources, at best looking past the human rights violations, looking past the fact that narcotics is the key component of its economy. That is at best.

It would seem that the Conservatives are prepared to do their bidding. I do not see a whole lot of Canadians filling these chambers, demanding that the government proceed with this and that we stop opposing it. It is quite the contrary. A lot of Hamiltonians have told me how proud they are that we have stood up, delayed and done everything we can to stop this bill from being law, to stop this free trade agreement from taking effect.

It is wrong for the Colombians. It is wrong for Canadians. It is wrong for the government to continue pushing this through. We on this side of the House, representing the majority of Canadians, will continue to do everything we can to kill it completely.

● (1610)

Ms. Judy Wasylcia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by thanking my colleague, the member for Hamilton Centre, for his very passionate remarks about a serious issue.

I can only imagine how much it pains him, having sat through the Mike Harris government and seeing that province dismantled bit by bit, to be now here in the House of Commons and to see the same bunch do the same thing to our country and the values that Canadians hold near and dear.

However, I am curious to know how he feels about another party in the House, the Liberals, who have acted in complicity with the Conservatives on this very serious issue, and whether he can justify the party of Laurier, the party of Pearson, the party of Trudeau now standing in the House today and saying that there is no such thing as torture in Colombia, that trade unionists are not being murdered, that human rights are not being abrogated, that women and girls are not being raped.

Could he square this circle in terms of Liberals who suggest, as the member for Kings—Hants has, that paramilitary forces murdering union leaders is in fact a falsehood? Could he help us to understand where the Liberals are at and why in the world they would be supporting the Conservatives with such a right-wing ideology?

Government Orders

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, there is no answer. During my remarks, part of me forgot that they were doing this. I mentioned that the best I had heard from them was the Liberals contended that this would help Colombians. By somehow getting us in there and doing business, we would magically transform their human rights atrocities into human rights protection and human rights promotion. There is no evidence of that. I leave it to the Liberals to defend themselves.

However, one has to ask the same question that I asked of the government. Whose bidding are the Liberals doing? Could they stand and list the Canadian groups and the Canadian leaders who are prepared to put their names and reputations on the line to back up this free trade agreement? Let us see that list. We have reams and reams of names of people and organizations that are quite prepared to stand up proudly and say that they oppose this agreement on principle because of human rights violations.

Let us see the Liberals, if they say they are standing on a just point, produce their list, produce those Canadians who are prepared to stand up and put their reputations and the reputations of their organizations and their members on the line to implement this free trade agreement with Colombia, which does nothing for the people of Colombia and does nothing for the reputation or purpose of Canadians.

•(1615)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is somewhat comical listening to the musings of the member, as he was part of a government that was so bad in the province of Ontario that it almost bankrupted the province. In fact, it was so bad that the former premier of the province, who he was a minister under, left that party to join another party because he was so embarrassed by the devastation that member and his party did to the province of Ontario.

I know he does not want to talk about the people who were out of work in the province of Ontario while he was in government. I know he does not want to talk about the disastrous record that he and the other members of his party had while they were serving in the government of Ontario.

I know he knows nothing about trade. If he did, Ontario would not have suffered as it did if it had a government of which many of the members he talked about, including the transportation minister, the finance minister, the industry minister and the great chair of the citizenship and immigration committee, were all a part.

He talked about the majority of the House being in favour of this bill. That is the reality. Yet what he and his party are doing is delaying the House, delaying an agreement. Why are they not listening to the majority of Canadians?

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, it is an interesting approach to take, given the fact that the member is so proud of the investments being made as a result of the decision to go into deficit to fight the recession, when the Conservatives did not want to do it in the first place. They were only forced to do it because of the possibility of being thrown out of office. Now they brag about it.

Floyd Laughren stood up in the Ontario legislature and said that he was going to go into deficit to fight the recession and protect

Ontarians. The government is doing exactly the same thing, bragging about it, except that it did not take pride of ownership. It had to do it because it was forced to it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am not necessarily pleased to have to speak about this bill today. In fact, it should not be here at the moment. The committee that studied it last summer recommended a study of its effects on human rights, as my colleague mentioned.

Therefore, I am going to talk about the environmental impact this agreement could have on the beautiful country of Colombia. The primary aim of the agreement is to promote Canadian extractive companies, in other words, the people who operate mines. This sort of work is not well regulated in Colombia. The agreement could at least have defined the types of extraction allowed and the manner in which Canadians could operate there. This could devastate a country where poor people are in poor health and live in insecurity because their environment will be destroyed by this type of mining.

Have my colleagues seen pictures of the type of extractive mining carried out in certain countries in South America and in Colombia at the moment? It is disastrous. Huge amounts of material are extracted and then used to obtain precious metals or lithium, in short, things that are quite rare. The quantity of waste generated is enormous. There is no thought of recycling or returning the land to its original state. They clearcut the trees, opening the way to landslides when there are heavy rains. It is a country of sudden and fairly heavy rains producing landslides that can sweep away entire villages. These people live right next to their place of work. They live in shacks because they cannot afford proper houses. Very often, these shacks are only built for temporary use.

A mine opens and operates for three years. It closes for a year, because the price of the metal has dropped. It then reopens for another two years. So the people are always living on the edge. They do not invest in the construction of good houses.

The material exposed to the air is collected by the floodwaters, which often carry dangerous and toxic raw materials into waterways. As we know, these mines are often in the mountains and the waterways go on for unbelievable distances.

The residue of heavy metals in river water is the hardest to remove because it is so fine, and the usual filters cannot readily detect it. In this country, mine operators—I could call them exploiters—can do as they see fit. They do not have enough money to install water filters powerful enough to remove the toxic waste from river water. People drink that water. Then they say that people die early because they are in poor health, but it is because they have been deprived of the chance to lead a healthy life in their own country.

Why are we imposing that on people?

Government Orders

●(1620)

It is because there are private interests that can extract this material, export it from Colombia and import it into our country. For a treaty such as this, and before finalizing this bill, someone should have studied the environmental impacts to see how changes could be made. That has not been done. In any case, if it has been done, we do not know about it. The government may have kept it hidden, because we were not told of any study of that kind, as had been requested by the committee.

In addition to the trees being cut down, the soil and water are also being polluted. It affects not just humans, but also the animal chain. The whole biological system will be left in a debilitated condition for decades before renewal begins, because there is no effort even to restore the land. Once the mining is finished, they will simply leave the machinery where it is; they will dump out the barrels of petroleum fuels and walk away. What goes on in those mines has to be seen. It is unbelievable.

They dump a barrel of gasoline. Yet, we know that one drop of gasoline will contaminate a thousand drops of water. Imagine how much water will be contaminated with each barrel. Often, the water table emerges further along because in the mountains a water table can extend for many kilometres; but it will empty unfiltered into a stream or water course. The toxic matter is not filtered by the soil because the water currents are quite strong and the water does not pass through sand and therefore is not filtered. Even if it did pass through sand, the material passing through would leave the sand saturated with dangerous matter.

In such a deal, consideration of the environment should have been fundamental. They say that we want to respect the countries that we trade with. We are not living in 1500 or 1800 when there was no concern for the environment. In a week or so, we will be into the year 2010. In this century, it is normal to consider the consequences of our actions on the environment. That has not been done in the bill. We find that is unacceptable. Why was it not done? It is because they wanted to protect private interests. Those interests are here in Canada, and when they tell us that this will make Colombia prosperous, it is only a smokescreen over the sea of free trade.

We are not against free trade, and I want to emphasize that. We are against free trade that does not consider the actual conditions in a country like Colombia. It could have been another country, but in that country we do not consider those conditions. On the pretext that these are poor people, that no one has the will to develop the enormous mines in that country, we negotiate an agreement with that government by telling them that we will trade goods. We know what things are exported from Colombia and that our trade with that country is minimal. That will not increase as a result of this agreement because the people there will not have any more money. The people will not be made richer because mining operators tear their country apart, destroy the natural systems and ecological balance, and then leave their mess behind after paying minimum wages.

In short, we are opposed to this agreement because, in the end, it is a bad agreement; it was made too quickly and to protect interests that are too limited.

●(1625)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating my colleague from the Bloc for his excellent remarks on this very serious subject. It is unbelievable, is it not, that the government should be concluding an agreement with Colombia, a country where there are so many murders, cases of torture and violations of human rights?

I put this question to my colleague. How can anyone explain the support of the Liberals and Conservatives for such a terrible bill?

In the name of humanity and all that is just, how can anyone explain a treaty with a country where there are so many murders? As the facts put forth by the member show, since 2008, the number of murders has been increasing. It is 18% higher than the year before. The use of torture is systemic and widespread and workers' rights are constantly threatened.

How can he explain the support of the Liberals and Conservatives for this bill?

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my NDP colleague for that important question. I will try to respond.

It is true that in terms of human rights, there is a great deal to be said, but other members have already spoken to that. For my part, I would like to respond to the issue of the environment. How is it that the Conservatives and the Liberals have joined in saying that the environment is not important? In fact, the answer is that the environment is not important in their eyes.

Those two parties are looking at the future through a rear-view mirror. They have not recognized that it is time to lift the rear-view mirror and look forward, especially the Conservatives, who have not stopped saying for the past two years that the Liberals did nothing for 13 years, while they have been in office for four years and they have done nothing for the environment. Four years; zero, nothing. They have no interest in looking after the environment.

The Liberals had problems with the environment. That may be why they will vote in favour of this agreement. They put forward some good proposals at one point and were ridiculed and condemned as populists by the Conservatives. Now, they have no idea where they are going. In the end, unfortunately, the environment is no longer an important value for them.

We really would like to see them wake up, find that energy again and say it is an important value and that they will vote against this proposed agreement because the environment is not protected.

●(1630)

[English]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to my good friend, the Bloc member, who raised the environmental issues. I have a question for him regarding the environment.

Why is it that the Bloc has voted no to every environmental program that the government has proposed? The Province of Quebec wanted \$300 million for its environmental programs and the federal government gave it \$350 million. What did the Bloc members do? They voted against that.

Government Orders

The member well knows that carbon capture and storage is a technology. We went to Berlin together and we heard that carbon capture and storage is a technology that the world is counting on. The reduction of 25% of greenhouse gas emissions are coming from carbon capture and storage. What did the Bloc do? Those members voted against carbon capture and storage. They voted against fuel efficiency standards.

Does the member really believe in climate change? Does his party really support getting tough on environmental issues?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my honourable colleague who is doing good work on the environment, but he has a veil hanging over his eyes, and, unfortunately, cannot see beyond the veil. He is a fine person and a good man. He works hard. I am not attacking him personally. It is his party that prevents him from seeing beyond the veil.

That prevents him from seeing that every time we are obliged to vote on the proposals he mentioned, there are other factors that are unacceptable to the Bloc Québécois, and he knows that. He knows why we voted against them. We did not vote against the environment. For us, the environment is fundamental and we will always vote in favour of the environment.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Mississauga South, Natural Resources.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me this opportunity to participate in the debate on the free trade agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia.

My colleagues have made it quite clear that the Bloc Québécois is against this bill. As we all know, the bill will help a few large Canadian mining companies at the expense of local Colombian populations and their environment. This bill does not require Colombia to respect human rights. Yet somebody needs to tell Colombia that it has to respect human rights.

It is incomprehensible that a country like Canada would choose to sign a free trade agreement with a country like Colombia.

People have pointed out that our economies are not comparable, yet one of the basic criteria for signing a free trade agreement is that the signatories have similar economies.

Free trade agreements should do more than just foster trade. We need to be able to go visit our partner's country, travel by plane while there, drive on their roads, go out and meet people. We need to be able to get into government buildings. Even if we sign this treaty, we will not be able to go there. It is a shame that the government does not really understand what it is saying.

Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada's website has a page about Colombia with advice and warnings for travellers. One of the headings says "Exercise high degree of caution". These are

warnings issued by the Government of Canada to travellers about Colombia.

There is no specific information about future terrorist activities or threats against Canadian citizens in Colombia. However, the security situation remains unpredictable. Possible terrorist targets include military and police vehicles and installations, restaurants, underground garages, nightclubs, hotels, banks, shopping centres, public transportation vehicles, government buildings, and airports located in major cities.

How can we conclude a free trade agreement with a country where it is dangerous to travel to airports located in major cities? How can we conclude an economic free trade agreement with a country where there could be attacks on government buildings? How can we put money in banks in a country that we cannot travel to because it is dangerous? We are talking about terrorist attacks.

In the same section it says:

Canadians should be vigilant and avoid any unattended packages or parcels and bring them to the attention of security personnel.

This makes no sense. Can we recommend that the Conservative government avoid any free trade agreements with Colombia?

Under the heading, "Regional Warning", it says, "Avoid non-essential travel".

Under "Official Warning", it says:

Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada [the Conservative government] advises against non-essential travel to the city of Cali and most rural areas of Colombia, because of the constantly changing security situation and the difficulty for the Colombian authorities to secure all of its territory.

Who is going to sign a free trade agreement? What minister would want to go to that country after reading this?

The paragraph goes on to say:

The exception to this would be some parts of the coffee growing area southwest of Bogota (Risaralda, Quindio and Caldas), and resort areas with established tourist industries, such as the Rosario Islands off the Atlantic coast and the Amazon resorts near Leticia. In all cases, travel to rural areas should only be undertaken following the overland travel advice in the Safety and Security section of this report.

There is more. The third warning, "Avoid all travel", begins like this:

Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada advises against all travel to the departments of Putumayo and Narino (excluding Pasto), located along the border with Ecuador, and to the departments of Arauca, Choco, Santander (excluding Bucaramanga) and Norte de Santander (excluding Cucuta), located along the border with Venezuela.

• (1635)

What follows is worth hearing:

The presence of armed drug traffickers, guerrilla and paramilitary organizations, including the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN (National Liberation Army), poses a major risk to travellers. These groups continue to perpetrate attacks, extortion, kidnappings, car bombings, and damages to infrastructure in these areas. Landmines are used by guerrilla groups, especially in rural areas.

And we are being asked to enter into a free trade agreement with a country that has guerillas, armed drug traffickers and paramilitary organizations? There is said to be a high risk of attacks, extortion and kidnappings. Who wants to sign a free trade agreement with a country that has these sorts of problems?

You are also advised against all travel to the departments of Cauca, Cauqueta, Guaviare, Valle de Cauca (excluding Cali) [earlier, the site said to avoid Cali] and Antioquia (excluding Medellín), to the southern parts of Meta department and to the city of Buenaventura, due to the presence of similar armed groups.

Government Orders

Signing a free trade agreement with a country we cannot even visit is insane. This very government says not to go there because it is dangerous. It says to avoid all travel to certain regions, to avoid all essential travel to other areas and to exercise a high degree of caution because of the possibility of terrorist attacks. I am going to list the places where attacks could occur. It is frightening.

Possible terrorist targets include military and police vehicles and installations, restaurants [Restaurants. Where will we eat? Should we bring a lunch?], underground garages, nightclubs, hotels, banks, shopping centres, public transportation vehicles, government buildings, and airports located in major cities.

We must not go to these places. This government is issuing warnings it is not heeding itself, because I imagine it is planning to go to these places.

According to the *Vivre ensemble* newsletter, published by Centre justice et foi, an organization that works to build a welcoming society for new immigrants:

—Canada is currently a leader in having Colombian refugees sponsored to settle permanently in the country. However, we must first look at the disturbing role Canadian companies have played in fueling the conflict, with the consent of the federal government. In 1995, the Canadian company Goldfields signed a contract to operate a gold mine with a rich local family. Until then, the mine had been artisanally mined by the inhabitants of the Río Viejo region. At the same time, paramilitaries massacred 400 people and drove more than 30,000 people out of the region. The soldiers who also participated in this atrocious carnage were known to have been trained at the School of the Americas.

This is from the *Vivre ensemble* newsletter. It is not pretty. It continues:

A second troubling fact is that the *Ottawa Citizen* recently reported that a Canadian aerospace company was working with the Colombian army to maintain its military helicopters. Vector Aerospace, a Newfoundland company, confirmed that it had received the blessing of the federal government [of Canada] to sign the \$6.5 million contract. The government felt that there was no valid reason to believe that this armament would be used against civilians. [Come on. Who else would it be used against?] The Colombian army and its associated paramilitary organizations have been singled out by numerous international observers, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, and found responsible for thousands of violent killings.

That was taken from last spring's *Vivre ensemble*.

This Conservative government does not care about the well-being of the Colombian people. A number of points make it blatantly clear that there is nothing in this agreement for the people of Colombia.

• (1640)

This agreement is about protecting investments. This agreement is about exploiting the local people and the Colombian environment. This agreement will not help Colombian citizens in any way.

[*English*]

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question for the hon. member. I listened very carefully when she talked about the people of Colombia.

Anything we do as administrations, no matter what party is in power, we always do with the good intention of improving the lives of our people.

In this case we are moving on the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement with what in mind? It is to improve the lives of our citizenry, ours in Canada and theirs in Colombia.

Does the member feel that by staying away we will improve the lives of the people in Colombia or does she agree, as I see it

personally, that by going there and showing them how we do things in Canada with our rules and the administration and so on, however we do it, we can improve their lives in that way?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his very pertinent question. Yes, we do sometimes wonder what came first, the chicken or the egg. Can we help a country by going there and setting an example? Or should we establish preconditions? We could say to them that we will be prepared to enter into a free trade agreement in future but that they first have to address the human rights situation, try to control their militia in the regions and rein in FARC. That is what we must say to them. Most importantly, we must require a prospective trading partner to respect human rights. That is of great importance to me.

I find the member's question a little odd because he says that by going there we can show them how it is done. And yet we cannot go there. The Conservative government opposite tells us, in its travel reports for those who would usually go there, not to go, that it is dangerous. That is what it is telling us. Terrorist targets could be government buildings, airports, restaurants, public transportation vehicles.

How do you set an example in that kind of situation? You cannot. You can tell them to come to our country to see how things work. However, before we explain how it works, all governments must be required to respect human rights. That applies to the government of Colombia as well as to any other government with which we wish to do business.

• (1645)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think my hon. Liberal colleague's reasoning is completely wrong. It is unbelievable. The Bloc Québécois member was quite right when she said we need to have some guarantees and promises that a country will respect human rights before we sign a free trade agreement. What the Liberals, like the hon. member for Kings—Hants, are saying is unbelievable, namely, that this free trade agreement could improve the situation regarding human rights abuses and social injustices. How can anyone agree with that argument? It is absolutely unbelievable.

Do we not need to absolutely assure Canadians and Colombians that we will demand that human rights be protected before signing any agreements or accords with that country?

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her question and her comment about the Liberal member. He said that we should set an example by signing the free trade agreement, then going down to see the Colombians and show them how democracy is done.

Government Orders

Anyone can see how things are working down there right now. In Colombia, democracy is ailing at best. They are having all kinds of problems running the country and preserving social order. What kind of example would the Conservative government give them? Here is what it would tell them: "Do not do things democratically". Even this free trade agreement with Colombia is not being done democratically. The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development did not want this agreement, did not want things to happen like this, but the government went ahead despite the committee's recommendation. That is what the Bloc Québécois' amendment is all about. We want nothing to do with this agreement.

[English]

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will just take a few moments. I have spoken before, but I think what prompted me to get up and speak on this Canada-Colombia free trade agreement is the responses that referred to the Liberal member and also to me.

I am going to take my few moments to give some examples of what other countries are doing, what we have been doing, and what we are trying to do with this free trade agreement. We have had witnesses before our committee, and I happen to have the honour of being the vice-chair of the committee on international trade. I used to actually chair the committee years ago when we were in government. So I would like to believe that I know a little bit about this file.

The member from the Bloc talked about setting prerequisites before we sign a free trade agreement. That makes sense. I accept that. Who says that prerequisites or conditions have not been set in this agreement or this bill that is before us? We must not mislead Canadians. We did not just step up to the plate and say, "Oh, let us sign an agreement." That is not what happened.

Here I am now, a Liberal member of Her Majesty's loyal opposition, defending what? A government bill. I am not defending the Conservative government bill. What I am defending here are jobs for Canada. What I am defending here is the opportunity for Canadians to get their share of the business, if I can put it that simply.

What we are also doing is we are doing it the Canadian way. This agreement that we are signing today is exactly the same type of agreement we have signed with other countries. It is on record. I just happened to stand up to participate in this debate, and I did not bring my notes, but I know I have referred to specific examples of other countries with whom we have signed these agreements with, like Israel, Costa Rica, the United States and Mexico.

This agreement today, between Canada and Colombia, is patterned around those same agreements. If we were okay to sign those agreements then, the question then becomes, why is it not okay now?

I also had the privilege of chairing the committee when President Uribe of Colombia was here in Ottawa. The gentleman came before our committee and talked about the reality of the situation. He is not walking away from the problems that Colombia is facing today. He never said there were not problems. What we are saying is, "Let us address those problems together."

Other countries have good trade agreements. Let me give one example. We have the European Union. It is a body of countries that decided to engage together and create a market. They keep adding every so many years to this community. Turkey is an applicant for membership to the European community.

Before they can become members, there are certain prerequisites that are set out that each country has to meet. Today Turkey is on a collision course with respect to the Cyprus issue. Cyprus is a full member of the European community, and there is a conflict there, whether it is entrance to ports, airports, the green line, or property rights. A country like Cyprus today is in the 21st century. We are not looking to conquer countries, we are looking to work with countries.

Turkey is an applicant member. Why is the European community saying no to Turkey? What it is saying to Turkey is, "Of course we want you to become a member and we want you to start meeting these targets. There is a progression until you reach full membership".

Mr. Peter Julian: You are making an argument.

Mr. John Cannis: I am making that argument.

Mr. Peter Julian: You are making our argument.

Mr. John Cannis: No, no. I am not making your argument.

Mr. Peter Julian : Vote against it. Vote against Bill C-23.

Mr. John Cannis: What I am saying is that we do not turn away from these opportunities which are our business people out there. Our business community is encouraging us.

• (1650)

There have been undertakings in Colombia to address the problems that exist: human rights violations, labour abuses, et cetera. The paramilitary has been brought up.

Frank Pearl, a highly recognized individual, was appointed some years ago by the Colombian government to help people reintegrate into society. There are tremendous amounts of money being invested so people can come out of the jungles, reunite and reconnect with their families, re-engage and retrain in order for them to become productive members of society. However, all this does not happen overnight. It cannot happen overnight. It is impossible for it to happen overnight, but it is one step at a time.

I have personally seen that the government of Colombia is very serious about taking on these challenges. What we as Canadians are saying to Colombia is yes, we are going to sign a free trade agreement, the same as we signed with Mexico, the United States, Costa Rica, Israel, et cetera.

I do not have the document with me, but I would be more than pleased to table the information I have available confirming what I just said in terms of the types of agreements we have signed with these other countries. The Canada-Colombia agreement is patterned the same way and uses the same types of parameters.

Government Orders

We have not lessened the conditions we are asking for as a country or the government is asking for today. I have personally expressed my support for it. If anything, we are becoming more stringent because when we signed an agreement years ago, let us say, with Mexico, between then and now we have learned, improved and fine tuned. We are always looking to better ourselves.

In response to some of the comments that were made earlier with respect to what the Liberal member said, referring to me, I can only encourage other colleagues to think of it this way as we hope to get this over and done with as soon as possible. There are several things.

The longer we delay, our country is going to lose out. We delayed in signing CAFTA, the Central America Free Trade Agreement. When the United States signed on, it was ratified by one vote. Canada lost out. Canadian jobs lost out. The Americans are looking at this agreement as well.

Earlier today representatives from the Pork Producers Association were in committee and they said the same thing, "Don't delay, it's going to cost us. Don't Delay". They were talking about how Korea, for example, had signed a free trade agreement and we were going to lose business. Our pork products are not going to be able to compete. Who is going to lose? Canadian jobs are going to be lost.

The end result is that people will be going on employment insurance, something the New Democratic Party was promoting two weeks ago when we were talking about improving EI benefits. Canadians do not want EI. Canadians want to work. They want to get up Monday to Friday to go to work and know that they can spend the weekends with their families and be proud of bringing home their bread and butter. That is what Canadians want to do.

What is it that we have to do as government representatives? We have to create a platform or the conditions, if I may say, whereby our nation, business people, farmers and manufacturers have the ability to flourish and prosper, and as they prosper, jobs and wealth are created. The big deficit we now have, thanks to the new Conservative Party, will hopefully be eliminated. That is why I am supporting this free trade agreement, to generate revenue and bring down the \$56 billion deficit.

I am in full support of it and I am asking the Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party to look at it from that point of view. If we stay away, we are not really helping the people we want to help. By going there, we will show Colombia how we do it in Canada. We will insist that certain things are undertaken to ensure that we are headed in the proper direction.

• (1655)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to my friend across the way.

Three and a half weeks ago I was in Copenhagen on an environmental conference preparing for a new international agreement. While I was there I met a legislator from Colombia and asked him if he was happy with this new agreement and how important it was for Colombia. He said very similar words as we just heard from the member, that it was important to give a country a chance to turn its back on some of the past atrocities and concerns and help it move forward.

If we bind Colombia's hands by not permitting it and Canadians to prosper, we are harming both countries. I would ask him to comment on how important it is that we work with other governments.

• (1700)

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, I was really moved when the hon. member talked about giving Colombia a chance. That is really what this is all about. People say that we do not agree. I think that when it comes to common sense, we Liberals at least find room to agree.

There have been many times when we have voted for legislation that has been brought forward by the government of today because we think that it is good legislation or that it makes a lot of sense. We are supporting this bill because it makes sense. We want to give, not necessarily a country, but a people the chance to get jobs, put food on the table and improve themselves.

When a nation is working, it does not engage in crime. I think we all know that when unemployment is down, crime is also down. If we are going to help put the people of Colombia to work, then we are also helping them reduce crime. If we put them to work, we are going to work toward eliminating the labour abuses and human rights violations that we have talked about.

We can only achieve that by being there. The sooner we are there, the sooner we are going to resolve this issue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point something out to my Liberal Party colleague, who also sits on the Standing Committee on International Trade.

When the report of our analysis of Colombia was adopted, the Liberals supported us, as did the NDP, in calling for and recommending that the government ensure that an independent body is established bringing together the various organizations representing business, the economic sector, but also human rights, so we would be able to assess the situation, and when the time came, give the green light for signing this free trade agreement.

A free trade agreement can also be used to change behaviour. If Colombia is interested in having real benefits, it will also be interested in making corrections to the way things are happening in Colombia.

We all know what is happening in Colombia. We know that there has in fact been an improvement.

That being said, has progress been significant enough that we can sign an agreement? If the Conservative government and its Liberal allies were serious, they would be proposing more investment in the area of international aid, through CIDA, for example, to make sure that Colombia gets out of this quagmire, this violence, and that there is an improvement from the standpoint of human rights. That is how the situation will be improved, not necessarily by engaging in trade solely to make money and supposedly to create jobs.

We know very well that the Liberals are supporting the Conservative government in order to profit from the situation.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, that is precisely why I used the example of Turkey as an applicant for membership to the European community. There is nothing wrong with doing a study, but we cannot afford to wait until the study is completed. We must move in parallel to whatever efforts are being undertaken.

That is why I deliberately used the example of Turkey as an applicant. There are violations that are taking place. I mentioned the Cyprus issue as one example. I do not want to mention any more, but the European community is not saying that it is not accepting Turkey's application or that it is not allowing Turkey to go through the process for membership to the European community because Cyprus is still under an illegal occupation. It is saying that it is moving along and also moving toward resolving the issue.

The same thing is being done with Skopje, in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, who wish to gain membership but are being shown the prerequisites. I agree with Skopje. However, we must not stop the progress and wait for the outcome of the study.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, really, I just cannot start without making reference to my Liberal colleague and suggesting that he actually read some of the provisions that are in the European Union arrangements as opposed to the non-existent preconditions of the so-called free trade agreements that we have been signing. The level of his lack of knowledge is really quite astounding.

With regard to what we are doing here, let me provide a bit of an overview. The basic question we have to ask is why we are here debating this issue. Why are we here, when there are so many other issues we could be facing that are so much more important? More specifically, why are we, as a legislature, having to review a bill that would incorporate a trade agreement with a country that has a reputation like Colombia's?

Despite some of the other suggestions we have had with regard to our getting some minor trade advantages out of this agreement, the reality is that we are doing this for ideological reasons, driven by the ideology of both the Conservative and Liberal parties. We have seen them, in spite of promises in many cases to the contrary, consistently sign these types of agreements that have repeatedly been to the disadvantage of Canada, through which we have been taken advantage of or, in the case of agreements with smaller countries, through which we have taken advantage of them.

We continue to do that because there is this fundamental belief on the part of the those two political parties that these agreements, in spite of all of the evidence to the contrary, work. I have to assume that sometimes they have some doubts about the viability and validity of these types of agreements, but even then, they have put so much political capital into these types of agreements, into the politics of this country in particular, that they cannot back off, and I think sometimes their denial of just how bad these agreements have been is almost Freudian.

These agreements are part of the failed globalization movement driven, to a great extent, by large multinational corporations for their benefit, not for the benefit of the individual countries and certainly not for the benefit of the workers in those countries.

I will just use one small example that always struck me so strongly. After we signed NAFTA, we studied the impact on wages in Mexico. In spite of all of the trumpeting of how great a success NAFTA was, the average wage in Mexico fell by more than 10% over that five-year period. It did not go up; it actually fell by over 10%.

We saw in the same country the devastation of the agricultural community, particularly those who grew corn, because of the swamping of their markets by the United States.

We could go on repeatedly about how these agreements do not work, but we continue to drive them forward. This government does, and the previous Liberal government attempted to do the same thing. In spite of all that evidence, they do it.

However, with Colombia, we have to say, "Enough". We have to look at that country and we have to ask how we could possibly agree to enter into a trade agreement with Colombia with the history it has which continues right to this day.

● (1705)

The member for Kings—Hants spent four days in Colombia listening to the propaganda of the government that was pushing for this agreement because it would benefit certain elements of Colombian society supported by that government.

This agreement will be a disaster for the average worker. It will be a disaster for environmental conditions. It will be a continuing disaster for human rights and human rights causes in that country.

The member for Kings—Hants was accompanied at that time by the member for Toronto Centre. They spent four days and became instant experts on Colombia after listening to all this propaganda. It was offensive listening to the member for Kings—Hants. I say that on a personal level because I remember the number of trade unionists from Colombia who have come through my riding over the last 10 or 15 years, some of whom went back to Colombia and were killed.

The member for Kings—Hants said that the death squads are gone and that the militia is not functioning there anymore. He said that even in the face of overwhelming evidence, report after report, that their activities continue to go on. Those death squads and those paramilitary units are closely affiliated with the full-time military and with the government of Colombia. They cannot pretend they do not know what is going on and know who is committing these atrocities.

Colombia has led the world consistently in the number of murdered labour leaders and labour activists. There has been a huge number of deaths in indigenous communities because multinational corporations and their allies in the corporate world in Colombia want to grab their land. Colombia has led the world in the number of human rights activists who have been killed or tortured as a result of the activities of those death squads and those paramilitary units.

Government Orders

Enough is enough. We cannot possibly think of entering into an agreement with a country such as Colombia. It is just completely foolhardy to think that by entering into an agreement, into what is really quite a nominal trading relationship, with no conditions on the environment, no conditions on labour standards, no conditions on human rights, that somehow we will magically bring that country up to the same standards as those of democratic countries. It is an argument that has no merit when one is dealing with Colombia, its government and the paramilitary. It has none whatsoever.

There are other models. There are models in South America, where some of the countries with larger economies have banded together to look at ways to increase trade between their countries without exploiting one country over another. It is a model that North America should be taking a look at.

The European Union tells Turkey and Czechoslovakia that they have to meet standards. Even after the countries have been admitted, they must continue to meet those standards.

I love the story about how the European Union said to Margaret Thatcher that her country could not be part of the European Union unless she fixed a minimum labour standard and a minimum wage. That was the big thing for her. She held out and refused to comply with that.

The European Union held out as well. It said it was not having a race to the bottom on employment standards and environmental standards. The European Union told her there would be a push to the top, that everybody would go to the top. The European Union wanted the best standards in the world and it has moved consistently on that. It is strong enough to tell those countries that are not prepared to move on that that they will not be allowed in. They will not get the advantage of the huge trading relationship it has established.

• (1710)

That is the model that we should be using, the model that the whole world should be using. We are seeing some of that already in South America. As the countries there began to democratize, they moved that way. It is interesting that those countries that have led the way on that have refused to enter into so-called free trade agreements with North America and they are continuing to do so. They are building their own model.

I see my time is just about up, but I will say there is absolutely no way that a country like Canada, which believes in democracy the way we do and human rights the way we do, should be signing on to this kind of an agreement.

• (1715)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yet again the member for Windsor—Tecumseh has shown why he is the most learned member in this place, as chosen by *Maclean's* magazine, and I hope that members in the Conservative and Liberal parties, which are willing to throw aside all kinds of principles including the basic principles of human rights and labour rights and social and labour standards to deal with an administration that has ties to both paramilitary thugs and drug gangs, will think twice and give their heads a shake about whether their constituents would actually approve of this kind of link.

This week we had yet another report on widespread torture in Colombia from human rights groups indicating that torture connected with the military arm of the Colombian regime has gone up 80% over the last five years. There have been hundreds of cases of torture committed by the military arm of the Colombian regime that the Conservative government wants to have a privileged trading relationship with.

Does the member for Windsor—Tecumseh think Canadians would find it acceptable that, with torture by the military arm of the Colombian government exploding in Colombia, he think it appropriate that the Conservatives and Liberals come together now to try to ram this agreement through the House with closure?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster for the question and also recognize the excellent background work he has done for us as a caucus and also the work he has done in committee to try to fight this agreement.

It is clear where Canadians stand. We are not supportive of any regime that is going to treat its people the way the Colombian government historically has treated its people and continues to treat them right up to this day. I have not had a chance to read that full report. I have seen summaries of it, and it is just shocking. As recently as this week we have received that kind of report, and yet we are here in the House somehow foolishly believing that if we sign this agreement it is going to change the situation in Colombia. It is not.

I want to make one other point. What Canadians expect from us, as they expect right around the globe, is that if we have the opportunity to do so, we should try to better the conditions of countries that we have relationships with whether through international bodies that bring pressure on them to change their practices, or through using our foreign aid. There are any number of mechanisms, whether or not there are other diplomatic mechanisms we can use to bring pressure on the government to change. That is what Canadians expect us to do. They do not expect us to just sign a blank cheque and allow this kind of conduct to continue.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in his speech the member for Windsor—Tecumseh referenced indigenous rights. I want to refer to the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal, the report of which, when referring to the extraordinary case of indigenous peoples, cited widespread acts of genocide, "imminent danger of physical and cultural extinction faced by 28 indigenous groups" and the fact that 18 of the communities have less than 100 members and "are suspended between life and death". The report went on to set "a horrifying list of human and labour rights abuses that are shocking [to] the world".

It is very disappointing that we have the Conservatives and the Liberals supporting the kind of trade agreement that is a direct violation of human rights, and I guess it is no surprise from the Conservative perspective because they refused to sign on to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I wonder if the member could comment on that link between the UN declaration and indigenous rights violations in Colombia.

Government Orders

• (1720)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan for her question. It was interesting because I think a number of us received letters this week urging us to pressure the government to sign on to the UN Declaration on Rights of Aboriginal Peoples around the globe. We are one of the few countries in the world, to our extreme embarrassment, that did not sign on.

For the Conservative government and, unfortunately, the Liberals to be willing to sign on to this agreement when we know those gross violations are going on for aboriginal peoples is just shocking.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if we look closely at Bill C-23, the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, it is difficult to understand why the Conservative government, with the support of the Liberals, is so bent on signing such a trade agreement.

From various viewpoints, this agreement runs counter to the concept of a responsible government working for the well-being of its citizens, but also the well-being of humanity. As my colleague, the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, mentioned earlier this morning, the agreement proposed by Bill C-23 contains no significant measure that would serve, for example, to improve human rights.

In a country that has the worst human rights record in Latin America, Canada, even though it has certain economic interests, has an obligation to set conditions that might improve the situation. Until we have evidence to the contrary, the Conservatives are once again in breach of their duty.

The record on workers' rights is just as distressing. Columbia is considered one of the worst places in the world for respect for workers' rights: unionists there are targeted because of their activities. They are victims of threats, abduction and murder. As someone with a background in the union movement myself, I find this situation totally unacceptable.

This is not to mention the number of men, women and children who have to leave the comfort of their home because of conflicts between the state security forces, paramilitary groups and guerrillas. More and more, economic displacement is forcing small subsistence farmers and small miners to also leave their land, to the benefit of the big agri-food corporations or, once again, big mining multinationals.

Entire populations are being forced to move. Once again, there are no significant measures proposed in this agreement to correct such injustices, and it is completely false to believe that such an agreement will help the cause of the Colombian people.

Why do we want a free trade agreement with Colombia? It makes you wonder about the real reasons driving the government, not forgetting the Liberals, to want to ratify this agreement, whatever the cost.

Colombia is the fifth largest destination of Canadian exports to Latin America and the Caribbean. It is the seventh most important source of imports from the same region. In other words, Canada has more interesting preferred trading partners than Colombia.

In recent years trade between Canada and the other Latin American countries has substantially increased, reducing the proportion of trade with Colombia compared with the other countries of the region. Furthermore, Canada exports mainly automobiles and grains, and the great majority of Canadian investments in Colombia are in the extractive industries sector.

In my humble opinion, and as mentioned by some of my colleagues, to sign a free trade agreement there must necessarily be a relationship of equals between the two states. So they must be preferred commercial partners, and the level of their trade must make it attractive to lower trade barriers.

Let us be honest: Colombia is not a very attractive market, considering that trade between the two countries is particularly limited.

Could it be that the main motivation of the Conservative government in signing this free trade agreement is not trade, but rather investment?

I wonder about this because this agreement contains a chapter on protection of investment which, without a shadow of a doubt, will make life easier for Canadian investors investing in Colombia, and specifically in the mining sector. This chapter is strongly modelled on chapter 11 of NAFTA, which in fact constitutes a charter of the multinationals to the detriment of the common good.

• (1725)

More specifically, NAFTA chapter 11, which was the inspiration for the provision on investment in this agreement, includes the following points. Foreign investors can go directly to international courts, passing beyond the filter of the public good provided by governments. Exports are so broadly construed that any legislation which allegedly has the effect of reducing an investor's profits can be equated with expropriation and result in a lawsuit. Even worse, the amount of the suit is not limited to the value of the investment and includes all potential future profits, which is far too much and totally unacceptable in this agreement.

This chapter has been criticized by everyone. As soon as some legislation, for example on human rights, reduces a foreign investor's profits, the government is exposed to astronomical lawsuits. It is ironic that when the Liberals were in power, they signed several trade deals with clauses similar to NAFTA chapter 11 but they were severely criticized for these abusive practices and stopped signing such agreements. There they are now, though, very clearly supporting Bill C-23. They are going backwards, therefore, and delegating to multinationals the task of judging the common good.

I hope even the Conservatives and Liberals do not think that multinationals will serve the general public by giving it the resources it needs and working to ensure more respect for human rights, the rights of workers and the environment.

Government Orders

When I hear the Conservatives and Liberals say ad nauseam that we should support developing countries and help them progress, they are not mistaken. The Bloc Québécois and I think we have a duty to help other societies to progress and we should give them all the resources they need to achieve their goals. However, the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement does not do this.

Bill C-23 does not contain any significant measures to improve the economic, social and environmental situation in Colombia. We should not use pretexts in order to achieve our objectives and should instead take advantage of these business opportunities to develop a concept of fair globalization that includes human rights, workers' rights, the environment and honest trade. That is what we want in Quebec.

We should remember that free trade is also supposed to help improve the lives of working people through higher wages and better working conditions. Even in Quebec, though, we find that a lot of companies prefer to close their factories and take advantage of low wages and the lack of adequate working conditions abroad. This approach creates unemployment in Quebec while the companies themselves continue to prosper.

Should we make this worse? We do not think so.

* * *

• (1730)

[English]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions between the parties and I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, during the debate tonight on the motion to concur in the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair and that when the last speaker has finished his speech or at the expiry of the time provided for the debate, the motion be deemed agreed to unanimously.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Colombia and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think the member hit on the real reason for the free trade agreement proposal when he started to talk about the business investment aspect of it.

We know that Colombia is not a significant trading partner for Canada. It is only our fifth largest trading partner in Latin America. We know that 2,690 trade unionists have been murdered in Colombia since 1986. In 2008, murders were up 18% over the previous year. So far this year, 31 trade unionists were murdered. Almost 4 million people in Colombia are internally displaced persons. Sixty per cent of this displacement has been in regions of mineral, agriculture and other economic importance and where private companies, the government and paramilitary supporters are forcing people from their homes. This is not a tranquil country by any means.

The Colombian government of President Uribe has been accused by international human rights organizations of corruption, electoral fraud, complicity in extrajudicial killings by the army, links to paramilitary and right wing death squads, and using its security forces to spy on the supreme court of Colombia. This is not a healthy environment.

The government is pursuing this trade agreement for other reasons and I think the member is on to what those reasons are.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments.

As I stated in my remarks, this agreement is not based on trade. Earlier this morning, I heard my Liberal colleague talking about pork production and the fact this agreement would save the pork industry. I strongly doubt that.

That same colleague was with me this morning at the meeting of the Standing Committee on International Trade, where we had an opportunity to hear Canada Pork International tell us that, at present, trade in pork meat with Colombia amounts to between four and five million dollars. That is not a significant amount and it certainly is not enough money to save the pork industry. It is proof that this agreement is really not about trade but rather about protection of investors.

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques for his very clear and rational remarks. He was really convincing. I believe if someone has to have the last word on this subject today, he is the one.

I would like to speak about the whole question of energy. Now that we are running low on gasoline and have much less natural gas, I would like to ask my colleague whether this is the time to be trading in pork or other export-import commodities, except perhaps heavy metals, diamonds or other high value items. Imagine a new agreement like that that would have us transporting items to a country as far away as Colombia at a time when the amount of energy in the world is changing?

Private Members' Business

• (1735)

Mr. Claude Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I can clearly see his great devotion to the cause of the environment. I congratulate him, and I thank him.

We talk a great deal about fair trade and reduction of greenhouse gases. It is true that putting meat into containers and exporting it will not produce any gain. As one who works in agriculture, I believe that, instead of receiving containers of meat, my farming colleagues in Colombia would prefer that we send people to show them how to raise pork so that they can start to feed themselves.

The Deputy Speaker: There are three minutes remaining before Private Members' Business. The hon. member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher therefore has three minutes to begin his speech.

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me these three minutes.

As it was put so eloquently by my colleague from the riding with the name too long to repeat for someone with only three minutes, the members of the Bloc will vote against this free trade bill. We have repeated it enough, although I think it cannot be ever said enough, that the real aim of this bill is not to expand Canadian and Quebec trade with Colombia or to get the innumerable jobs that one of our colleagues in the Liberal Party claimed earlier to expect from such a bill. The real aim is to give free rein to Canadian investors in Colombia to act to the detriment of human rights and people's aspirations for development. In addition, it testifies to the usual indifference of the current Conservative government to all of these humanitarian considerations and respect for human rights.

We in the Bloc do not oppose in principle the provisions to protect investors in such treaties. We understand that investors want to be protected up to a point, but there are civilized ways of doing so.

Let us take the example of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement—I am not referring to NAFTA, but to the agreement between Canada and the United States that preceded NAFTA. It contained a chapter on investor protection, chapter 16. It was the first agreement in the world that contained a mechanism to resolve potential disputes between both sides of the agreement. The agreement worked well in its day. No case of discriminatory measures against a foreign investor was reported. No case went to the arbitration tribunal. And still the value of Canadian investment in the United States increased considerably during this period.

The clause in the treaty with Colombia is totally abusive, as my colleague explained. As a result, the Bloc Québécois will definitely oppose this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member will have seven minutes to conclude his remarks when the House resumes consideration of this bill.

It being 5.38 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from October 22 consideration of the motion that Bill S-205, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (suicide bombings), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to take part in the debate on Bill S-205. Since this is a bill that starts with "S", it means that it began in the Senate and has arrived in this place. It was introduced in the Senate by a Liberal senator. He can be very proud of his work in the field this bill deals with, which is terrorism and justice.

Senator Grafstein introduced this bill in the other place. I understand that he will be retiring in December. I think he will be recognized for this legislation, for all the great work he has done over years and for his service to Canada. Senator Grafstein is well known by all members of this House.

Hon. John Baird: A very good member.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, he is a very good member, as my colleague, the Minister of Transport said. I am sure the senator would appreciate that.

Senator Grafstein is also well known in this House for the fact that over the years he has worked very hard to maintain strong relations with our neighbour to the south, our strongest and greatest trading partner, the United States. Not only has he done that, but he has also advocated very strongly and vehemently over the years on behalf of Canada with his many colleagues and friends in the American Congress and Senate. He has very good contacts there and has advocated on Canada's behalf. He has tried to influence things positively and has often done so over the years.

For instance, he pointed out to our American friends that when 9/11 occurred, none of the terrorists who took part in those actions came from Canada. This is an important point that some of our American friends unfortunately did not understand at the time.

Since they are supporting this legislation, it is clear that the NDP, the Bloc and even the Conservatives share that sentiment and recognize the value of our senators and their contributions. It is a positive sign. The fact is all parties in this House have shown their support for Bill S-205 which passed the Senate on June 10 of this year.

The Senate adopted the bill to ensure greater clarity in relation to particular measures. The Liberal Party fully supports this initiative and we support this bill. Of course, it being a private member's bill, these matters are free votes for our party, but I can say confidently that my colleagues will be supporting it.

It is a very short bill. It essentially has one key paragraph that I would like to read:

Section 83.01 of the Criminal Code is amended by adding the following after subsection (1.1):

(1.2) For greater certainty, a suicide bombing comes within paragraphs (a) and (b) of the definition "terrorist activity" in subsection (1).

Private Members' Business

Canadians probably believe that suicide bombings are already illegal under our Criminal Code, and they are right. Someone listening may ask how we would penalize a suicide bomber. If the person is successful, obviously there is no penalty that can be applied. However, suicide bombers are not always successful. What we are talking about, in part, is someone who attempts to commit a suicide bombing, or perhaps people who might try to assist or prepare that person for that event, to supply the person with materials for example. These are all relevant parts of that activity.

It is simple common sense that a suicide bombing would be considered a terrorist activity. I had a look at the definition in section 83.01 of the Criminal Code, and it is a fairly long and complicated definition of what terrorist activity is. I think it is reasonably clear, but it would not hurt at all and it is probably wise to make this absolute clarification for greater certainty.

I endorse what Senator Grafstein has done in this regard. It is no wonder that all parties in the House are supporting this bill.

My understanding is that we will be the first country in the world to take this step to clarify this matter, and it is a positive step. I look forward to the bill going to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and to its eventual passage.

Suicide bombings are horrendous, terrible acts. Who can forget watching the television on the morning of September 11, 2001?

● (1740)

I remember sitting in my office in Nova Scotia. The night before, I had been at a reception at what we call the World Trade and Convention Centre in Halifax. My assistant came into the room and said, "Turn on the TV. I just got a call saying that a plane has flown into the World Trade Center". I thought my assistant meant the one in Halifax. That was my first reaction since I had just been there the night before and had it in my mind. I turned the TV on and saw that it was not that at all, that it was the World Trade Center. Moments later, maybe a minute or two after turning on the television, I saw the second plane fly into the other tower.

With the first plane I thought maybe it was an accident, that it was possible there was some bizarre situation with the pilot, a mechanical problem, a problem with navigation and somehow the plane ended up flying into the building. But with the second one, everyone knew. It did not take long to dawn on me that there was only one possible explanation, the horrible explanation that it was, and we all saw the terrible result. Even while watching the flames it did not occur to me; maybe there were structural engineers watching who recognized what would happen next, but I do not think most of us could imagine that those buildings would collapse in the horrible way they did with the tremendous loss of life that resulted.

That type of activity has never happened here. We have been fortunate in Canada. We have been spared that sort of terrorist attack, which was a successful attack certainly, but we have seen the devastation that it has caused abroad. Thousands of innocent people have died and even more have been injured.

This is truly a despicable act and we must recognize that. I hope we never experience it here, but we must recognize that there is the danger of experiencing it here. It clearly is a distorted action of

depraved and distorted minds, people who are misguided and who perhaps have been brainwashed in various ways.

Let us think about the number of suicide bombings that have been carried out around the globe in the last number of years. We were all shocked by 9/11, as I mentioned. We remember the one in Madrid, which was not that long ago. In 2007 there were the London subway attacks. In 2008 there were the attacks in Mumbai, which are being recognized this week with the Prime Minister's visit there.

This bill serves to illustrate the fact that suicide bombings happen elsewhere, that they are horrible and that they could, sadly, happen here. The statistics are shocking. From 2000 to 2004, 472 known suicide bombings took place in 22 different countries. Wow. They resulted in more than 7,000 people killed and tens of thousands wounded, the horror of those actions on innocent people.

Going beyond this bill, we need to address the root causes of terrorism. I am not saying we could ever eradicate all people who might commit a terrorist act, but it is important that we work for peace to flourish, that we work to reduce the possibility, that we work to remove the fertile ground on which terror may flourish. We need to ask why it happens and what we can do to stop it.

The changes to the Criminal Code with this bill help set the stage for that kind of discussion. Senator Grafstein has done a tremendous service with this bill, as he has so often done throughout his career. It is appropriate to acknowledge his hard work for initiating this bill many years ago. It has been a while getting to this point. Because of his commitment, we are able to send a clear message to the world that this country stands firmly against terrorism.

Let me conclude with a quote from Senator Grafstein. He said in February:

Suicide bombing has become an all too frequent practice in many countries throughout the world. Thousands of civilians are killed and maimed to advance a cause based on falsely implanted expectations of glory and martyrdom. We say no cause can justify suicide bombing.

● (1745)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise, as I think everybody else has so far, to support this bill. The bill, and I have said this to my caucus, in its technical basis may not be necessary. In fact, one could argue strongly it is not necessary. However, that is not the reason we would support it. We support it because of the message it would send. I think that is clear from, again, some of the speeches I have heard from all parties, that we understand this.

In that regard, to be a bit technical, this is an amendment to a section of the Criminal Code that is part of the anti-terrorism sections in the code. There is a specific provision now in the code that speaks of violent acts as being a terrorist activity, depending on what the intent is of the conduct. We are amending that to say suicide bombing would be a specific example of this type of violence. Again, as a lawyer, it is probably not necessary to do this.

Private Members' Business

However, in terms of the role we also play in this legislature, and in any democratically-elected legislature, we also have to provide leadership and examples to the country. Part of that leadership and the examples we provide are on those occasions when we need to speak a strong voice of denunciation, and we must do that. This is one of those times it is necessary to do that.

One could argue that there are all sorts of other times where we may do it and not have any particular impact and so we probably should not. However, in this case the message we would send to our citizenry and to rest of the world is this is a particularly abhorrent type of murder, one that has become, unfortunately, for the peace and safety of the world, all too common.

In preparation for this, I did some background reading. One could argue that this type of murder, this type of violent, abhorrent criminal activity, is a fairly new concept, and there is a great deal of truth to that. I think most observers internationally recognize that the first modern suicide bomber came out of the conflict in Sri Lanka, in the late 1960s through to the mid-1970s, and was used very often, again, unfortunately for the peace and safety of the citizenry of that country.

Unfortunately, it also provided a message to other terrorist groups and groups bent on the use of violence to achieve their ends, a methodology that could be used, and it has spread to any number of countries in the world. Our response to that must be this act of denunciation on our part, to simply say this is not acceptable.

Again, there are strong arguments that we can go back and look at the use of people committing a criminal act, killing other people and, at the same time, taking their own lives. It existed long before the incidents in Sri Lanka made this so prominent a tool for those who had a significant absence of sanity in their conduct.

• (1750)

It is impossible to imagine anyone encouraging other people to strap explosives to their bodies, conceal them on their bodies, move into a highly travelled area where there are a number of other human beings and set off those explosives, taking their own lives and those of any number of innocent bystanders. It is the act of someone who is insane.

I do not have any doubt in my mind that by supporting and passing the bill, it will change the minds of those people who are that lacking in mental health. However, there is a broader audience to which we need to speak, the audience of those individuals who would consider doing this and allow themselves to be talked into it. They need to hear that democratic societies do not function on the basis of force and violence. We need to repudiate that at every opportunity.

Since we are being given that in this case, it is appropriate and very important that the House as a whole, when this comes up for a vote, which I believe will be tomorrow evening, give this unanimous support. I know it simply means it will go to committee and we will study it more there. I cannot imagine there will be any amendments. It will then come back here and, again, it is extremely important that it receives unanimous support for the purposes of expressing denunciation and sending this very clear message. If one is going to consider using violence to achieve one's ends, whether they be political, religious or any number of other ideological goals, a

particular violence that is as abhorrent as this is, we are going to denounce that as the representatives of our country, both to our citizenry and to the rest of the world.

• (1755)

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak in favour of Bill S-205. The bill introduces greater certainty into the Criminal Code by specifically including the term "suicide bombing" under the definition of terrorist activity.

Some may ask why I, as a member for Parliament for Abbotsford on the west coast, would take such an interest in the subject of suicide bombings. Abbotsford has not yet experienced terrorism first hand, although drug and gang related violence remains a very serious challenge to our city and to our region. However, the residents of Abbotsford do understand that terrorism, in all of its forms, does in fact threaten our way of life and the values we hold so dear, values such as freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We understand how pervasive the threat of terrorism is and how difficult it is to fight this scourge within our global community.

The most important responsibility that governments have is to protect their citizens. It is a public trust, a sacred trust that is imposed upon us as parliamentarians to protect Canadians. That is why our Conservative government has been so focused on addressing some of the holes in our criminal justice system.

Let me provide the House with at least three reasons why I am supporting Bill S-205.

First, this year I had the opportunity to travel with our Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism to India. Abbotsford has a large number of residents who identify themselves as Indian and maintain strong relationships with the world's largest democracy. Among other things, the minister and I travelled to the city of Mumbai where we visited the Taj Hotel and Chabad House. Those familiar with the events of November of last year know that these two facilities were among the buildings that were attacked by terrorists, resulting in the loss of many innocent lives, including the lives of two Canadians.

Chabad House was a hostel and a trading centre for the Jewish diaspora. Essentially it was a place of respite for travellers and others seeking spiritual guidance. The terrorists who attacked the centre tortured and then ultimately executed a number of the residents of that facility, including a rabbi and his wife. Similar scenes of horror played out in other parts of Mumbai, and the reason for these horrific acts, a complete absence of respect for the dignity and value of human life.

I am very pleased that yesterday our Prime Minister visited Mumbai to pay his respects to the Canadians and others who lost their lives in the Mumbai terrorist attack. As always, Canada stands in solidarity with India and the other nations of the world that defend freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

In May of this year I also had the opportunity to visit Israel and to meet with Israeli parliamentarians in their Knesset. Israelis are deeply appreciative of Canada's outstanding leadership in consistently speaking out and acting against anti-Semitism. Sadly, many around the world still have not learned the lessons of history and continue to advocate hatred and genocide against others.

The Israeli MPs we met with also expressed their profound concern over the very real and ongoing threat that terrorism, including suicide bombings, represented to their country and to Jews and other minority groups around the world.

My experiences in both India and Israel have reinforced my commitment to speak out against extremism and intolerance of all kinds, and I do strongly support the bill.

The second reason I support the bill is the ongoing threat that terrorism and suicide bombings represent to the safety and security of the brave men and women of our armed forces. Canada has lost over 130 Canadian soldiers to the conflict in Afghanistan. Some were lost to combat. Some were actually lost to accidental events. Many of the deaths were the result of cowardly roadside bombings. On top of that, 11 soldiers and one Canadian diplomat lost their lives to suicide bombers in Afghanistan.

• (1800)

Suicide bombers represent a daily threat to our soldiers as the latter do their part to improve safety, security and human rights in Afghanistan. The voices of our fallen Canadians call out for us to do everything in our power to ensure that other Canadians, both here in Canada and abroad, do not meet a similar fate. Bill S-205 responds to that call.

The third and final reason for my interest in this bill is the impact that terrorism has had on Canada. Sadly, Canada is not immune to the ideology, extremism and hatred that motivates terrorists. We kid ourselves if we believe that terrorists are not interested in Canada. It would be a mistake to forget that 24 innocent Canadian lives were lost during the tragic events of 9/11.

Canadians also remember and continue to mourn the tragic loss of hundreds of lives in the Air India bombing, a terrorist act spawned right here in our own country. Moreover, not long ago, 18 alleged terrorists were arrested in Canada. Their plan was to attack political and other high-profile targets in our country, including our Prime Minister. A number of the accused have already been convicted or have pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit terrorist acts and have been sentenced to prison terms.

Does Canada face an ongoing threat from terrorism? It most certainly does. That is why any legislation, including this bill, which improves the clarity and severity of the criminal sanctions against terrorism deserves our support.

There are those who state that the current definition of terrorist activity contained in the Criminal Code already implicitly includes suicide bombing when it is committed in the context of terrorism.

That may be so. A closer look at the definition of terrorist activity in the Criminal Code appears to incorporate criminal conduct as envisaged by the United Nations counterterrorism conventions. The second part of the definition includes terrorist activity that intentionally causes death or serious bodily harm, or that endangers a person's life.

The bill before us simply clarifies, for greater certainty, that suicide bombing is indeed a terrorist activity. There is also one added benefit to this bill that has already been articulated by others in the House. By specifically including the term "suicide bombing" in our

Private Members' Business

Criminal Code, Canadians will demonstrate international leadership by specifically denouncing such bombings as a form of terrorist activity.

There is significant support in Canada for this bill. I am pleased that all four parties in the House have indicated that they plan to endorse this bill. There is also a group in Canada called Canadians Against Suicide Bombing, a Toronto-based group led by a former judge. It has been a leader in developing support for this Senate bill. Indeed, this organization has been successful in circulating an online petition that is generating much additional support. Many other Canadians have also signed an open letter of support.

The terrorists who commit these heinous acts will use women and children. Apparently, they are now even using mentally disabled children to conduct their heinous acts of carrying out suicide bombings. Suicide bombers strike all over the world. They strike at Canadians, Israelis, Iranians, Pakistanis, Indians and Sri Lankans. They strike at any target in order to advance their destructive agenda.

I strongly endorse Bill S-205. Once again, Canada has an opportunity to demonstrate its strong international leadership in defending free and democratic nations around the world who abide by the rule of law. Denouncing suicide bombings is simply the right thing to do. It goes without saying that I encourage all members of the House to support this bill.

• (1805)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, with her five-minute right of reply.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to sponsor Bill S-205 and to close off our discussions today during this second hour of debate before, I trust, it is sent to the justice committee.

I want to summarize my opening comments and those expressed during the debate. However, before I do so, I would like to recognize and thank Senator Grafstein for his dedication and hard work in bringing this bill to the House.

The bill, as amended, is not overly broad or vague but still fulfills its intended purpose. The proposed amendment is designed to provide for maximum precision regarding what forms of suicide bombing are included in the definition of terrorist activity, and makes certain that suicide bombings unrelated to terrorist activity are not caught by the definition.

The definition of terrorist activity in section 83.01 of the Criminal Code has two components. The first incorporates a series of offences enacted to implement international legal instruments against terrorism.

The second, more general, stand-alone component states that a terrorist activity is "an act or omission" undertaken "in whole or in part for a political, religious or ideological purpose, objective or cause" intended to intimidate the public or compel a person, government or organization "to do or to refrain from doing any act", if the act or omission intentionally causes a specified serious harm.

Routine Proceedings

Specified harms include causing death or serious bodily harm, endangering life, causing a serious risk to health or safety, causing substantial property damage where it would also cause one of the above listed harms and, in certain circumstances, causing serious interference or disruption of an essential service, facility or system, whether public or private.

Suicide attacks are intended to kill and maim innocent people and to inflict extensive property damage. Attackers are prepared to die in the process. Anyone who reads a newspaper, listens to the radio or watches television knows that suicide bombings occur on an alarmingly regular basis.

We all remember the attacks of September 11, 2001 that killed nearly 3,000 people in the World Trade Center in New York City. We also remember the July 7, 2007 London bombings and, as was mentioned, the 2008 attacks in Mumbai, India.

Bill S-205 is crafted to ensure the utmost precision about what forms of suicide bombing are included in the definition of terrorist activity.

No other country is known to refer specifically to suicide bombing in its definition of terrorism and terrorist activity, so Canada would be the first to signal its abhorrence of these cowardly acts by adopting such a reference in its legislative definition of terrorist activity.

Members of the House have a unique opportunity to be an example to the world. By passing Bill S-205, a made-in-Canada initiative to cover suicide bombing explicitly and to ensure that anyone who organizes, teaches or sponsors suicide bombing is criminally liable in Canada, you would be promoting a worthy aim.

Accordingly, I wish all hon. members in this chamber the fortitude to do the right thing and to pass this bill.

•(1810)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I declare the motion carried.

Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

(On the Order: Concurrence in Committee Report:)

November 2, 2009—That the Seventh Report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology (recommendation not to proceed further with Bill C-273, An Act to amend the Competition Act and the Canadian Environmental

Protection Act, 1999 (right to repair)), presented on Monday, November 2, 2009, be concurred in—Mr. Chong

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 97.1(2) the motion to concur in the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology (recommendation not to proceed further with Bill C-273, An Act to amend the Competition Act and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 (right to repair)) presented on Monday, November 2, 2009 is deemed to be proposed.

[Translation]

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to address Bill C-273.

[English]

I am pleased to speak to the motion regarding the recommendation not to proceed with Bill C-273, the right to repair bill, which was proposed by my NDP colleague the member for Windsor West.

I want to commend the member for Windsor West for having proposed the bill. It is not easy for members of the House to successfully propose legislative changes that will better the lives of Canadians and Canada. It is rare for a private member's bill to be adopted by the House and even rarer for that bill to be adopted by the Senate and to receive royal assent. In effect, that is what has happened here.

The bill has been successful because of the adoption of the Canadian Automotive Service Industry Standard by automotive stakeholders. It is precisely because the purpose of the bill has been effected that the bill will not go any further in the parliamentary process. For that I want to commend the member for Windsor West.

In proposing the bill last spring, the member for Windsor West really forced auto sector stakeholders to recognize that they had to change. Those auto sector stakeholders realized that if they could not come together voluntarily to improve access to information and technologies that would allow independent repair shops to fix late model vehicles, then they would be forced to legislatively.

As a result of this realization, the stakeholders worked through the summer to resolve their differences and at the end of the summer they arrived at a voluntary agreement that was satisfactory to all parties involved. This voluntary agreement would not have happened had this private member's bill not been tabled in the House and had it not gone to committee.

The agreement, which is called the Canadian Automotive Service Industry Standard, or CASIS, is a voluntary agreement that was negotiated by vehicle manufacturers along with other stakeholders. It will make information and tools for the repair of vehicles available to independent repair shops on the same basis that brand name auto dealers have had for some time now.

Before I talk about the specifics of this voluntary agreement, let me first talk about the important role that the auto sector plays in the Canadian economy.

Routine Proceedings

In 2008 there were 14 large scale passenger and commercial vehicle assembly plants which assembled more than two million vehicles in Canada. To put that in a North American context, this year North Americans are expected to purchase somewhere in the range of 10 million vehicles or so. Clearly, we have a significant portion of vehicle assembly in North America, close to 20%.

These 14 plants, which assembled these two million vehicles, represented 12% of our overall manufacturing output and 18% of our manufactured exports.

The sector directly employs 140,000 Canadians and another 230,000 Canadians are employed in the aftermarket sector. In addition, 30,000 Canadians are employed in the service and repair industry.

In 2008 the average life of a vehicle on the road was eight years. It is estimated that over the course of an average vehicle's life, \$14,000 in repairs and service would be required. By 2010, it is estimated that this overall market in Canada will be \$19.2 billion. That is a big market.

Because the aftermarket repairs and service is such an important part of the Canadian economy, the government is pleased to see that the automotive sector, that is the automakers on the one hand and the aftermarket repair and service sector on the other hand, come together to sign on to CASIS.

Before CASIS was agreed to some independent automotive service and repair shops expressed concern that they were not always able to provide service to their customers because they lacked the information, the tools, the software and training required to accurately perform the diagnostic and repair services so often required on today's computer controlled vehicles.

Under this voluntary agreement, all repair and service shops will be able to access repair and service information provided they do two things: first, they commit to the provisions of CASIS; and second, they make the necessary investments in equipment, tools and training.

This voluntary agreement is consistent with the spirit and intent of the instructions that were provided by the Minister of Industry when he wrote to officials in the automotive sector on April 14 of this year. In that letter he expressed a desire to resolve the right to repair issue and stated the government's support for an industry-led voluntary solution, fashioned after the U.S. agreement, which would satisfy the needs of Canadian automotive auto repair companies.

• (1815)

In the United States, vehicle manufacturers in the aftermarket industry worked together to develop a national automotive service task force, a voluntary agreement that has been in place for more than a decade. The benefits of the Canadian agreement is that it will foster greater competition by giving automotive consumers greater choice on where they get their vehicles repaired.

While we have supported the intent of my colleague's private member's bill, Bill C-273, we believe that a voluntary agreement negotiated by the private sector is superior to government regulation and are pleased that the committee and the member has agreed to this as well.

Let me finish by thanking all the people who worked so hard to get this agreement in place, the people at the National Automotive Trades Association, the people at the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association, the people at the Association of International Automobile Manufacturers of Canada, and all their member companies. I also want to recognize the Automotive Industries Association, AIA, for its persistence in bringing this matter to the attention of parliamentarians. I want to recognize the Minister of Industry for using this private member's bill to convince all the stakeholders involved to come to a voluntary agreement.

Finally, I want to recognize and thank the member for Windsor West who recognized the significance of this issue, introduced a bill that brought the issue to the forefront, and resolved the issue in the industry. Without him, none of this would have happened.

Competition is essential to the functioning of the marketplace. The Canadian automotive service industry standard agreement enhances competition by providing automotive consumers with a greater degree of choice about where they fix their vehicles. That is why I will support this voluntary agreement and that is why I support this motion not to proceed any further with Bill C-273.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address Bill C-273 on behalf of the Bloc Québécois.

Before I begin, I want to thank the hon. member for Windsor West for presenting this legislation, which seeks to promote competition in the automobile maintenance sector, so that Quebecers and Canadians can enjoy affordable, accessible and quality services.

When a member tables a private member's bill and invests time and efforts in it, it is always nice to see that things can be changed. In this case, some actions were taken. The parties involved came to agreement, which means that this bill is no longer necessary.

In recent months, many if not all members of Parliament have received emails and letters asking them to either support Bill C-273, or oppose it. Personally, I received numerous representations from independent repair shops, dealers, associations and officials representing the various stakeholders.

On September 29, an agreement was reached on the maintenance of motor vehicles between the Association of International Automobile Manufacturers of Canada, the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association and the Canadian auto repair and maintenance industry. This agreement means, for all intents and purposes, the death of Bill C-273. I am using the word "death", but we could also talk about a "happy event", since an agreement was reached between the parties involved.

Even though Bill C-273 did not go further in the changes that it proposed, it was still a step in the right direction.

This is why, during its review by the Standing Committee on Industry, the main witnesses were pleased to see that the agreement essentially put an end to Bill C-273.

Routine Proceedings

I am convinced that the pressure resulting from the introduction of Bill C-273 and its review in committee helped negotiate a quick solution. Since a similar voluntary program has been in place in the United States for the past few years, it was probably just a matter of time before an agreement would be reached here.

During my speech at second reading, I explained why the Bloc Québécois supported this legislation. I am going to quickly explain our position on this issue.

More and more, vehicles require electronic diagnostic tools. As a result, independent repair shops in more remote regions do not have access to the information needed for proper maintenance and repairs to vehicles. People who live in rural areas must travel great distances to have their vehicles serviced and repaired.

The bill would allow repair facilities in the regions to service vehicles for Quebeckers and Canadians in the very communities where they live. It would also allow consumers to go to the repair shop of their choice.

Neighbourhood garages in all regions of Quebec and Canada are important. Two of the largest replacement parts distributors, NAPA and Uni-Select, are located in Quebec. Together, they employ hundreds of Quebeckers in a Montreal plant, and they rely on neighbourhood and rural garages.

• (1820)

We think that the agreement and the forthcoming discussions among the parties will help protect jobs.

It is clear that this agreement among the parties will give consumers more flexibility in choosing the businesses they want to maintain and repair their vehicles. Auto makers want consumers to keep doing business with them. The Bloc Québécois believes that vehicle owners should have the right to choose their own mechanic.

During my previous speech on the subject, I asked why the solution we are talking about today had not already been implemented. For several years now, the United States has been considering legislation that would establish a policy similar to what we are debating today. They implemented a voluntary system that enables anyone to access the information for a fee.

In closing, I would like to thank all of the groups and stakeholders who appeared before the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology for sharing their point of view with us.

Providing vehicle maintenance and repair technicians with access to the information and tools they need will improve the vehicle repair and maintenance market. Businesses will benefit from healthy competition and consumers in Quebec and Canada will benefit too.

I will close by saying that we support this motion. Once again, we are pleased to see that the parties to these talks have reached an agreement that will be good for consumers.

• (1825)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak today in support of this motion.

I want to begin by thanking the member for Wellington—Halton Hills, the chair of the industry committee. It is important for people to know that our committee, not only on this bill, is an example of the parliamentary process for a number of different reasons. The first and foremost reason is that the chair provides a fair and balanced approach, which is appreciated for many other pieces of legislation, as well as this one.

I would also like to thank the member for Saint John who just spoke. It is important to recognize that when this bill went through its first vote in the House of Commons, it passed with a margin of 248 in favour. I thank all those members who considered the importance of this bill, and that is critical.

I would also like to thank the parliamentary secretary, the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, because this has been very much a challenging issue. I have spent three years on this bill trying to get a result, hopefully, for Canadians. If it had not been for working through problems, I do not think we would actually see a solution, which is now the CASIS agreement. As noted earlier, this is a provision that is new to Canada, which is something important to recognize. It has been available in the United States. The Americans actually have a different system. They have a system that is a national automotive service task force but it is backstopped by legislation.

I believe, though, that this bill is no longer necessary because there has been an agreement reached by all parties involved and I believe there will be enough public pressure on that.

I also would recognize that the current Minister of Industry and the previous minister of industry took interest in this, and I thank them both for doing so, to ensure Canadian consumers are protected.

I do want to impress upon people the importance of this bill in terms of what it means. It is important not just in terms of competition but it means a cleaner environment and it means public safety.

What was happening in our country is that we were literally being treated as a colony in many respects. We were being treated differently from the United States, Europe and other jurisdictions where new technology relating to onboard diagnostics, computerization literally of the automobile, was not being successfully passed on to the aftermarket industry. The end result was that Canadians could not get the best service or the most competitive prices.

What it meant for many of these aftermarket garages, many of which I visited across the country over a number of years, is that we would see technicians in Canada, who were better trained than those in the United States, who could not successfully repair vehicles because they could not download a program, for example, which is a real quick and easy thing to do. They wanted to pay for it and wanted to ensure it was done within the law but at the same time they were not provided it.

Routine Proceedings

Meanwhile, the people in Windsor, Ontario, where I am from, could drive their cars over to Detroit, Michigan and get the same type of service from somebody less trained because the information was being provided by that company. Quite frankly, there were some companies that were better than others. General Motors is better, in general, about providing this information. Ford has recently released more of its information to comply with the spirit of the agreement which comes into effect later on, but will roll out, I hope, a very successful program. I believe the minister in this Parliament will have a due diligence to ensure that Canadians are treated fairly past the date of this bill.

When we look at the aftermarket, it is important to recognize its significance. This concerns over 200,000 jobs in Canada. I come from the auto sector. In terms of the auto industry, and Windsor being the auto capital of Canada, a bill like this would be seen with some type of curiosity. People may wonder why the member who represents the area of the auto market would bring in a bill that some of the auto companies were very opposed to. The reason is that after we sat down and started talking to some of these small shop owners and to the consumers, we saw what was going to take place. We were going to lose some very successful businesses across this country and we were going to see people even in the rural areas having to drive hundreds of kilometres further to get their vehicles serviced because of unfair competition, in my perspective, with the unavailability of codes, training and diagnostic equipment that was being provided in other nations across the globe, and particularly the United States, our neighbour.

That is why I introduced the bill and I would like to thank my family for putting up with travelling across the country to promote this.

• (1830)

I think of the people who have been part of this, and first and foremost are Nancy and Roger Suranyi of Namao Automotive who live just outside of Edmonton. I had a chance to really see the spirit of what was happening. They could not provide the same services they once did. Their facility was as clean as a whistle and their technicians were very well trained. It had been a family business for many years but they were slowly losing business related to the aftermarket. They could not get the same codes and equipment that were available before. In looking around the facility, not only did we see vehicles that needed repair but we also saw other vehicles, like a school bus, an ambulance and other types of service vehicles. I saw them in Windsor as well when I went to visit John Sawatsky of MSJ Automotive. We would have our Windsor police cruisers and ambulances in there.

The loss of this other business puts these businesses at risk and, subsequently, the service of other types of fleets of vehicles that we need a strong aftermarket for because they are not serviced through the normal dealership associations that are available.

That is why I introduced a bill in the previous Parliament which, at that time, was Bill C-425 and now it is Bill C-273 in this Parliament. It was fortunate enough to be selected high on the order paper.

It has been a great experience because I have learned more about Canadian business and the spirit of competition through this process

than I ever thought I would. I would like to thank my staff who put up with this as well: Mohammed Pierre, Melanie Namespetra, Darlene Dunn Mahler, Karen Boise and Kieren MacKenzie, and all the volunteers we have because we really worked with a team. This took a lot of extra resources. Without their constant support, I would not have been able to go across the country.

I think about people I met, like Art Wilderman from the Canadian Independent Automotive Association, Bento from Toronto, John Strickey of Midas Auto Service in Halifax, Ron Jones of Mid-Island Automotive in Nanaimo and Mario Schuchardt of Canadian Tire in Burnaby. Those people often represented people who did not have a voice in the previous process. The aftermarket association had been advocating for a change for many years and, in my opinion, there had not been the respect paid to the industry that was necessary. Hence, the legislation was seen as the alternative because they could not go any further.

I also would like to thank a number of people from AIA: John Cochrane, Larry Goudge, Marc Brazeau, Deborah Moynes-Keshen, Mireille Schippers, Patty Kettles, Christine Farquharson and Scott Smith who I particularly want to recognize because he worked diligently on this bill and spent a lot of time away from his family. Also from the association were John Watt, Brad Morris and Mauro Cifelli.

It was an interesting group to work with because we saw medium and small businesses that banded together to bring forth an issue.

What we get with this agreement, the Canadian automotive service information standard, is a voluntary agreement that I am hoping the minister will keep a strong eye on. I am sure it will come to fruition. There will now be a process in place for the disbursement of the information, the codes, the technical information for the equipment, as well as the training capability.

It is very important that we recognize that none of this is to be provided for free. What they are asking for is the right to compete and that is why the bill has come forward. There is now a process in place to regulate the actual advancement of the codes, the training and the technology. There is also a dispute mechanism if there is a problem with regard to the releasing of that.

It is also important to note that it will no longer be a dog's breakfast in terms of which company will provide information and when. There would be a process in place for fair competition for all Canadians, which is good for public safety, for the environment and for consumers to choose the right to repair.

• (1835)

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to discuss Bill C-273.

The auto sector is an essential part of the Canadian economy. It has created hundreds of thousands of high-paying jobs for Canadians and has fuelled the growth and prosperity of cities and towns across the country. The automotive repair and services sector has certainly played a large role in contributing to our prosperity as well.

Routine Proceedings

The automotive repair and services sector encompasses non-warranty activities related to automotive repair, which includes autobody and collision service. The activities are performed at over 30,000 establishments located at car dealerships, independent garages, specialty shops and branded retail outlets.

However, as I am sure all of us in the House are aware, the technology that goes into automobiles today is becoming increasingly sophisticated. In order to repair and service newer vehicles, there are highly specialized and specific tools that require technical training and diagnostic information. As these vehicles become more complex, aftermarket repair shops have become increasingly frustrated as the latest repair information was not always readily or easily accessible.

In search of a solution to this problem, the hon. member for Windsor West brought forward Bill C-273, a private member's bill that would legislate auto manufacturers to make information and tools for the repair of vehicles available to independent aftermarket repair and service facilities.

While the federal government supported the notion that all aftermarket service providers should have access to diagnostic information on the fleet of vehicles on Canada's roads and highways, we certainly prefer the voluntary approach recently agreed to by the automotive industry over the legislative approach that Bill C-273 proposed. Therefore, we agreed with the industry committee's decision to adopt the motion of the hon. member for Windsor West last month that Bill C-273 need not proceed any further.

The voluntary approach agreed to by the auto industry, which I referred to earlier, is known as the Canadian Automotive Service Industry Standard, or CASIS. It is a voluntary accord in which vehicle manufacturers have agreed to make information and tools for the repair of vehicles available to independent service and repair facilities.

This voluntary agreement is consistent with the spirit and intent of the instructions provided by the Minister of Industry when he wrote to officials of the automotive sector on April 14. In that letter, he expressed his desire to resolve the right to repair issue and stated the government's support for an industry-led voluntary solution, fashioned after the U.S. agreement, which would satisfy the needs of the Canadian after-market auto repair industry.

One primary benefit to a voluntary system, in addition to keeping government out of telling business owners how to run their affairs, is that it would do more to harmonize our approach with the approach taken in the U.S.

On September 29, the Minister of Industry participated in the signing ceremony of CASIS between the National Automotive Trades Association, or NATA, the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association and the Association of International Automobile Manufacturers of Canada. Things are moving very quickly on the implementation of this agreement.

The Automotive Industries Association of Canada, or AIA, has since stated their intent to enter into the agreement as a full partner. Each of the automakers have committed to implementing the terms specified in the agreement by May 1, 2010.

CASIS is modelled after the standard established and currently operating in the United States, known as the National Automotive Service Task Force. The National Automotive Service Task Force was the model of choice because it has a proven track record, having now been in operation for more than 10 years. All repair and service shops, regardless of association, will be able to access available repair and service information provided they commit to the provisions of CASIS and make the necessary investments in equipment, tools and training.

While CASIS is modelled after the American version of the voluntary agreement, it is actually broader in its application than its U.S. counterpart because it includes collision and glass aspects of repair service.

CASIS will see the creation of an associations' working group that will monitor the implementation and ongoing effectiveness of the agreement to ensure continued industry support. As part of the agreement, any unresolved issues will be taken directly to the automaker, an approach that is both co-operative and aimed at resolving issues quickly.

This agreement will pave the way for Canadian independent service and repair providers to access emissions and non-emissions related service information, diagnostic tools and training information. It will continue to protect the intellectual property rights of car companies while addressing implementation issues and technical challenges as vehicles evolve and become increasingly complex.

● (1840)

Since this is a national initiative, the accord will be operational in the entire Canadian marketplace for all companies in the automotive aftermarket. It is an agreement that is fair to the repair and service sector, it allows for choice for consumers, and it is industry-led, a great combination.

I want to thank some people as well. I want to thank the National Automotive Trade Association and the Association of International Automobile Manufacturers of Canada, the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers Association, the Automotive Industries Association of Canada, and their member companies for their diligent efforts to arrive at this agreement and for their commitment to implement this agreement quickly.

The hon. member for Windsor West should also be commended for his determination to see the issue resolved. He originally introduced Bill C-273 in the previous parliamentary session on April 17, 2007, when it was known as Bill C-425. His initial decision more than two and a half years ago to put this issue in the spotlight has played a large role in getting us to where we are today and his efforts should be recognize.

Routine Proceedings

I would like to close by noting that automakers are now working hard toward meeting their commitment to have CASIS fully implemented by May 1, 2010. Let us offer them our support, while recognizing that we have had a full debate on all of these matters and that our way forward is to allow the voluntary agreement to take hold. We should be proud of the fact that we have all worked together to achieve these positive outcomes for all stakeholders, including consumers and all members of this chamber.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise and speak to this seventh report. It seeks to stop the process regarding Bill C-273, An Act to amend the Competition Act and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, which was put together by the member for Windsor West. Essentially, the bill sought to provide a real balance in the market place, provide information to independent repair facilities, and help Canadian consumers.

I know that a number of the other speakers have already spoken to the incredible diligence and energy of the member for Windsor West. He has done Canadians a fantastic service by conceiving the bill. Primarily, he understood that there was a problem and that the problem was not only becoming a bigger challenge for independent repair facilities but resulting in higher costs to consumers.

The member for Windsor West got to work and drafted the bill, even before people were really aware of the growing extent of the problem. Over the past couple of years, he pushed ahead with the bill so that it could come forward to Parliament. In doing so, he was able to provide the incentive to have the industry resolve the issue.

On May 1, 2010, as a result of the efforts by the member for Windsor West, we will be in a situation where the information is going to be provided to independent repair facilities. Costs will inevitably come down as a result. I would like to add my own bouquet to the many flowers that have been tossed in the direction of the member for Windsor West. He is a member of Parliament who has truly shown what honesty, hard work and diligence in advocating on behalf of his constituents and Canadians right across the country can result in. He is a real model for all of us. I cannot stress that enough.

The member for Windsor West came to my riding of Burnaby—New Westminster with his family. Terry, Alex and Wade are fully supportive of everything that the member for Windsor West has done. They came to my riding. We held a press conference at the Market Crossing Canadian Tire. As was mentioned by the member for Windsor West just a few moments ago, Mario Schuchardt, the manager of that Canadian Tire, was kind enough to open up his facility so that we could do that press conference.

The reaction from people in my riding and right across the lower mainland of British Columbia was strongly in favour of the legislation and the change. There was no doubt. It was essentially a no-brainer. People saw that there was a problem. People saw that the member for Windsor West was bringing a solution. People from my constituency and throughout the lower mainland of British Columbia supported the bill.

Why did they support it? It is very simple. In this case, it is just one more example of an NDP MP helping to make the market work. We are not those kinds of individuals who believe in blind adherence

to market forces. We want to see the market work in a very effective way. That happens when information is shared freely and when consumers are not put in a bind or given a limited number of choices. There are very clearly cases when the public sector is an important alternative. We strongly support a public sector.

However, when we are talking about a situation like this that is driven by market forces, the information has to be made available. New Democrats stand up to ensure that information is available, to ensure that consumers have choices, and to ensure that we do not see the kind of imposition that we sometimes do. In this case, the bill sought to provide that information to independent repair facilities.

An increasing number of vehicles were subject to the onboard diagnostic analysis. As a result, the withholding of the information from independent repair facilities limited the number of places to which a consumer could go. That inevitably results in higher prices. When the independent repair facility right next door does not have access to the information needed to repair a vehicle, that not only means that consumers have to go further afield but it means that they have a limited number of choices.

• (1845)

We are talking about licensed mechanics who have the ability to repair automobiles, the ones people trust in their neighbourhoods. The ones who provide support in the community are there but people cannot go to them because increasingly we are seeing a situation where the diagnostic information and software was not made available even though the repair facility was trying to get it. This is obviously a problem, a problem for community businesses and, unfortunately, a real problem for consumers.

The member for Windsor West saw that situation and wanted to ensure that Canadian consumers had more money in their pockets, particularly at a time when most Canadian families have been earning less over the last 20 years. Under NAFTA, the free trade agreement, and various right wing economic policies, we have seen that most Canadians are earning less.

The member for Windsor West wanted to ensure that families were not being gouged. He put forward the bill and that really galvanized the industry sector, to its credit, to take action. The agreement, CASIS, the Canadian Automotive Service Information Standard, would not be before us without the bill by the member for Windsor West.

We have to be very clear about this. There would not be the stipulation that by May 1, 2010, the software has to be provided to independent repair facilities. This was the catalyst and motivation to push the industry to come up with standards and the agreement.

Now we have a situation where independent repair facilities and original equipment manufacturers are together, with a dispute resolution component and process, that allows the industry sectors, the aftermarket and original manufacturers, to come together and resolve the difficulties. That is extremely important. What that means is over the next few months, by May 1, information will be available to independent repair facilities.

Routine Proceedings

For Canadians it means that if Joe and Jill down the street purchase a new automobile, they can go to the independent repair facility they have been going to for many years. If Joe and Jill have been dealing with an independent repair facility for many years, they may have an arrangement with the facility that may cost them a lot less. That is all because of the work of the member for Windsor West.

We have here an effective resolution to a problem identified by a member of Parliament, the member for Windsor West, due to his own due diligence and hard work right across the country. I do not know how many cities he went to, dozens of them, to talk to independent repair facilities, to people who were impacted by this, and to consumer organizations.

Through his due diligence he has brought forward a bill that provoked action and in the end has resulted in a win-win situation, an agreement within the industry that gets the industry's act together, that ensures that information is not withheld, and an agreement that leads to lower prices with the competition that we certainly want to see in communities across the country.

What the member for Windsor West has done shows the very best in parliamentary action. A member of Parliament who was elected to represent his constituents saw a problem that could be resolved through action. He took that action, did the drafting, educated the public and the media, and ensured people were aware of the extent of the growing problem at that time. Through his persistence, diligence, stubbornness and hard work resolved that issue for Canadians. It is the very best in parliamentary action.

• (1850)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too am very proud of the member for Windsor West in his long uphill struggle with this particular issue. Having had a background myself in consumer affairs for 23 plus years in Manitoba, I recognized this issue right away upon being elected. I must admit it took me a couple of minutes to sort it out because I did not really understand it straight up. I talked to the member about it.

In Winnipeg I spoke to two General Motors dealers who are friends of mine. They were quite concerned. As a matter of fact one of them contacted me. When we sat down to get to the bottom of their concerns, we found there was a certain amount of misrepresentation. At the end of the day, they accepted that it was not a bad idea after all. It was interesting that General Motors was apparently the most cooperative company to deal with this.

When we think about it, the bill started with the member from the fourth largest party in the House. We can talk about rolling the ball uphill. Not only did the member start this two and a half years ago, but when Parliament dissolved the member had to start over again. After every election and with a new government everything has to be reintroduced. When one goes through that process, at a certain point one wants to throw up one's hands and give up in a lot of cases, but the member did not do that.

This particular issue was not as sexy as some consumer affairs issues, and I have dealt with a few of them over the years. Nevertheless it did have its appeal.

I knock on a lot of doors in my constituency and over the course of a weekend in the fall, this issue came up two or three times, as did the credit card issue and the air passenger bill. Interestingly enough, in a couple of cases it was put forward by teenagers, people who were 19 and 20 years old, which really amazed me. I asked how they knew about this right to repair. They knew exactly what it was all about.

I think the member had a terrific issue. He carried it as long as he could. He in effect was the cause of the final resolution of the problem. This is going to benefit consumers for many years to come.

When most members in this Parliament were young kids, we all knew the local garage could fix that '49 Ford and that '57 Chev. In fact I had one of those at one time. It cost me \$35. Each door was a different colour, as I recall. That car could be fixed by anyone.

Today it is not possible to find a garage that will fix any car newer than 10 years. It boils down to the owner having to go back to the dealership and repairs by a dealership can cost a lot of money. If one has a lot of money, then it is not a problem, but if one is operating on a budget, going back and forth to the dealer can be a problem.

I want to lead from there into another area that many people are not familiar with, which is CAMVAP. CAMVAP is our answer to a lemon law which has become very popular. There has been a lemon law in all 50 of the United States for the last 15 or 20 years. I introduced legislation in Manitoba a number of years ago on the lemon law. There is the weak lemon law that can be found in the car belt in Michigan and there is the very tough lemon law that can be found in Florida.

Generally speaking, under the lemon law dealers are required to give consumers a book when they buy a new car so that they know their rights.

• (1855)

If the car has lots of problems and turns out to be a lemon, the manufacturer has four attempts to fix it. I have attended arbitration panels in Florida. By the way, they settle roughly about 50% for the public and 50% for the car companies. Of course, air conditioning is a big issue there. If the car cannot be fixed within four attempts, the car company will have to buy back the car with a depreciated amount so and the consumer will get out of the problem.

What did Canada's manufacturers do as an answer? They saw that the consumer groups and legislators were starting to introduce bills across the country and they were alarmed. They formed CAMVAP, an organization consisting of all of the governments across Canada. The head of the Consumers' Association of Canada sits on CAMVAP. The downside is that no one knows about it. The last two cars I bought, I prodded and poked the salespeople at the dealership about my CAMVAP book. I wanted the information on what would happen if the car turned out to be a lemon. I got blank stares. They did not have a clue about it.

Routine Proceedings

Unlike the lemon law in most of the United States where consumers are given the book when they buy the car and the coverage is explained to them, in Canada we do not have any such procedure. We have the lemon law, but no one knows about it. As a matter of fact, when I gave this speech the other day, someone in the crowd asked me to spell out the name, CAMVAP. She said that her car was at the 160,000 kilometre mark and it was not acting very well and she wanted to check into the CAMVAP situation.

The general insurance companies and the life insurance companies have done a similar thing to what the member for Windsor West has succeeded in doing. The general insurance companies had bankruptcies 20 years ago which left consumers hanging. Their claims were not being paid because the little company which insured their house went bankrupt. The insurance companies recognized if they did not do something, government would step in and people such as the member for Windsor West would start introducing private member's bills, so they moved quickly. They formed an organization similar to CAMVAP whereby general insurance companies as a group would take responsibility for any failures within that group. If the insurance company in Manitoba for example went bankrupt and could not pay its house insurance claims, then the insurance companies would use the money they had been levying each other to pay for those claims. They would pay the costs of taking care of the problem and winding down the company.

That was happening almost 20 years ago. The life insurance companies did the same thing because they had the same sort of problem.

This points out the fact that MPs and MLAs in any jurisdiction in this country should not get discouraged. They tend to, but they should never be discouraged because it is private members' bills like this one that can end up with conclusions such as the member for Windsor West just achieved. He will be remembered for that for many years to come because he has done something that no one else was able to do. The problem did not start yesterday; it has been around for a number of years and he provided the solution when no one else did. He deserves full credit and full honours for that.

● (1900)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will not take up much of the House's time. All hon. members have had an opportunity to hear an important story that took place surrounding the subject matter of Bill C-273.

I became involved in this issue a number of years ago when a couple of constituents who owned repair shops told me about the movement that was happening and that they were very concerned about what was coming down the pipe.

As has been explained, this is a matter of competition and competition is a good thing. Competition means that people have choices and it also ensures that the purchase of goods or services is competitive and fair.

Automobiles have become more and more complicated to the point where independent auto repair shops were unable to provide the kind of service necessary for certain makes and models of cars simply because they required specialized tools, manuals and diagnostic equipment and training. This was just not possible and not really affordable.

It is interesting to note the parallel that is going on right now before the CRTC with regard to television and cable companies. The chair of the CRTC made an impassioned plea to the disagreeing parties and he basically asked them why they could not negotiate a way out of the problem. He asked them why they could not get together and deal with it. He was aware of both the issue and the problem.

The parallel is that the United States already has an arrangement between the major automobile manufacturers and the repair shops to provide the resources necessary for those businesses to continue to operate.

What we have now is basically an arrangement, and it is one of the reasons why this bill does not have to proceed. Repair shops and manufactures have come to a voluntary agreement and this agreement is in the public interest.

This issue caused members of Parliament to inform themselves, to meet with the automobile industry and the manufacturing industry, and to consult with the repair shops to determine what was going to happen.

One of the reasons I took a particular interest in this issue is because it was clear that business opportunities for independent repair shops was going to be contracted as a result of cars becoming more complicated. That meant people were going to be put out of business and families would have to find other ways to provide for themselves.

This issue became a consequence of a technological change. After warranty issues disappear, cars are lasting much longer, and there needs to be an alternative because if there is no competitive environment it means that consumers can be at risk.

A good thing has happened here. The subject matter has been discussed by Parliament under the proxy of this bill. The bill wanted something else, but ultimately the same result came out, and that is a good thing.

I am a big fan of private members' business. I know that the member for Windsor West has worked on this bill very diligently. I know he is pleased with what he has been able to bring to the table and send a message that one way or another we can make things happen here. It is always better if the parties who have a competing interest can see that there is a way for mutual benefit and that the public interest can be served at the same time. That is a good outcome no matter what we are talking about.

● (1905)

I want to congratulate the member for Windsor West. It has been a long-standing problem to resolve, and I think that the resolution is appropriate. The House should be proud of its participation in resolving an important issue in regard to a certain segment of our economy. To the extent that a small segment is a little bit more stable, a little more secure, then so is our country. Congratulations to the member.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Pursuant to an order made earlier today, the motion is deemed adopted.

*Adjournment Proceedings***ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, about mid-September I received an email which turned out to be from the executive assistant to the president and chief executive officer of the Toronto Port Authority. It was sent out using the generic "Dear Friend", and it relayed information about a political fundraiser for the Minister of Natural Resources. Attached to it was a flyer that had information about a political fundraiser on September 24 at a downtown Toronto restaurant. Admission was \$250 a head minimum, it said. There would be no corporate donations. The only name that appeared on the order form for tickets to this event was that of a gentleman, Michael McSweeney.

Michael McSweeney is a registered lobbyist. He works for the Cement Association of Canada. He was the one who was the principal organizer, we found out subsequently, of this fundraiser on behalf of and for the benefit of the Minister of Natural Resources whom he is also registered to lobby. The Cement Association, over the prior eight months I believe, had lobbied a number of officials and ministers, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of Natural Resources on six or seven occasions or more.

I brought this matter to the attention of the House because the Prime Minister has a guide for the ethical conduct of ministers. Annex G of that code or guideline specifically states that government resources should not and cannot be used for political purposes. The Toronto Port Authority is a federal agency. Its resources were used; the computers were used; its database was used to send out emails to people, soliciting purchase of tickets for a fundraiser for the benefit of, it turns out, the Minister of Natural Resources.

It appears that there are clear violations. There are a number of potential violations. They have been reported to the Ethics Commissioner, to the Commissioner of Lobbying, to the Privacy Commissioner and also to the Commissioner of Elections Canada. There are other investigations flowing from this that have already been brought forward.

This story broke the day before I actually asked my question, and the Minister of Transport, who is the minister responsible for the Port Authority, is quoted as saying when it was raised:

The practice is wrong, it is totally unacceptable, it is totally inappropriate.

My question to the minister was basically what the consequences would be if someone had done something that was wrong. There was an impropriety, and whether that was under the rules guiding port authorities, the Canada Marine Act, their own bylaws or the Prime Minister's own guide for ethical conduct of ministers, there must be a consequence.

To date there has been no response from either the Prime Minister or the transport minister other than to say that they would wait until

the Ethics Commissioner dealt with the complaint lodged with her, and that she was doing this investigation.

The fact is, it has nothing to do with the Ethics Commissioner. It has to do with the Prime Minister's code of conduct, and I really want to know why there is no action, no answer to the allegations that have been made against the Minister of Natural Resources.

• (1910)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the hon. member for Mississauga South for his intervention this evening.

Our government takes these allegations very seriously. This government prides itself on accountability and ethics, and that is why we strengthened the powers and responsibilities of those arm's-length agencies that are charged with investigating such matters.

The Minister of Natural Resources continues to cooperate fully with the ethics commissioner. The minister is following and will follow the commissioner's advice and guidance.

The issue is being examined by the ethics commissioner, and therefore it would be inappropriate for me to comment.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, as we found out today in the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, the ethics commissioner has no responsibilities and no authority with regard to the Prime Minister's guide for the ethical conduct of ministers.

In fact, the only person who can determine whether there is a breach is the Prime Minister. The only person who can mete out a sanction against the minister is the Prime Minister.

In prior Parliaments there used to be an ethics counsellor between the Prime Minister and his code to advise the Prime Minister. That is not the case now.

The facts are clear. The port authority has admitted that it occurred and has said that it will not happen again. The board of directors has taken no action. They are waiting and are calling for the Auditor General to come in. The Prime Minister has refused to respond to these allegations. This is totally unacceptable.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, our government takes these allegations very seriously.

We are a government that prides itself on accountability and on ethics. That is why we strengthened the powers and responsibilities of those arm's-length agencies that are charged with investigating such matters.

The Minister of Natural Resources continues to cooperate fully with the ethics commissioner. The minister is following and will follow the ruling and guidance of the commissioner.

This issue is being examined by the ethics commissioner, and therefore it would be inappropriate for me to comment.

Adjournment Proceedings

•(1915)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:15 p.m.)

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