



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Monday, May 25, 2009**

—  
**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, May 25, 2009

The House met at 11 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

## VACANCY

MONTMAGNY—L'ISLET—KAMOURASKA—RIVIÈRE-DU-LOUP

**The Speaker:** It is my duty to inform the House that a vacancy has occurred in the representation, namely Paul Crête, member for the electoral district of Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, by resignation effective May 21, 2009.

[*English*]

Pursuant to subsection 25(1)(b) and subsection 26(1) of the Parliament of Canada Act, a warrant has been addressed to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for the election of a member to fill this vacancy.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

### CRIMINAL CODE

(Bill C-301. On the Order: Private Members' Business:)

February 9, 2009—Second reading and reference to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security of Bill C-301, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act (registration of firearms)—Mr. Garry Breitkreuz.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville is not present to move the order as announced in today's notice paper. Accordingly, the motion will be dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

[*Translation*]

The sitting of the House will therefore be suspended until noon.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:05 a.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1200)

[*English*]

### CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC)** moved 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.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank the House for the opportunity to address issues related to what I believe and what many people believe is an important government initiative, and that is the establishment of a formal free trade agreement with Colombia.

Canada is as prosperous as it is, as a nation, because in fact we have been free traders since our very beginning. We can manufacture and produce more than we can consume. We discovered early on that if we are going to remain prosperous and maintain a good standard of living of which we can be proud, then we need to be a trading nation.

Of course, if we are going to be a trading nation, we cannot have one-way trade. If we want doors of opportunity to open up for our citizens, workers, investors and entrepreneurs, then we also have to allow other markets to experience the same possibilities. There are those who would say that keeping our doors closed is the best way to protect workers and industry. History has shown that not to be true.

I can give the House an example, and this may appear to be an extreme example, but for the sake of emphasis and elaboration, let us look back 100 or so years to the advent of the motor car and the development of mass production by Henry Ford, which resulted in a key industry around the world today.

When the motor car was being developed, people in other countries were saying that if these automobiles were allowed to cross their borders, it would put out of work those people who make buggies for horses to pull. They felt that people would not want buggies anymore but instead would want motor cars. Let me take this to the extreme. What if Canada had said that we could not open our doors to these motor cars because all the people who built wagons pulled by horses would be out of work?

*Government Orders*

That happens to be true. The advent of the motor car did put out of work those people who manufactured buggies, or harnesses to go with buggies, or wheels, or whatever. Thankfully, Canadians had the foresight to say that we could develop mechanized buggies, but to do that we also had to make sure our doors of trade were open. By doing that, people prosper.

Those who had been engaged in the making of buggies eventually became engaged in making parts for automobiles. Not all of them did that, obviously, and so the government of the day looked at re-education and retraining, and developed ways for people displaced by a particular product or a particular service to find work and be trained to do other things in other areas.

So it is when we look at free trade, especially in a time of economic downturn. This is a time when we need to open doors of opportunity for investors, producers, innovators, and Canadian workers. Not only do we have to maintain an open door policy, but we have to pursue more open doors around the world.

Canada is a member of the World Trade Organization and that entire process. Many countries are involved in this organization as well. The Doha round is somewhat stalled. Our Prime Minister and other world leaders have said the Doha round has to get moving and brought to a conclusion. That is our goal.

As we go through that somewhat difficult and prolonged process, we cannot have everything remain static. We cannot wait for the World Trade Organization process to be completed. It is a good process and a process that will lower tariffs and lower barriers for many countries around the world, but we cannot wait. We want to see the Doha round conclude, but at the same time we are pursuing free trade agreements with other countries.

• (1205)

Right here in this House of Commons, we are debating a free trade agreement with Peru, looking at it and hopefully moving it along, and I thank all colleagues for being engaged in that particular discussion.

We were also engaged just recently in bringing to a conclusion an agreement that we called the EFTA, a European free trade agreement with four countries: Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein. In this agreement we saw the removal or the significant reduction of tariffs right across the board, allowing many Canadian products to go into those countries without the producers being hit with big tariff penalties. In other words, those Canadian products can move into those countries and Canadian producers will not have to face a competitive disadvantage of having a tariff laid on top of those Canadian products.

We know that we will see increased production. We will see more product going from Canadian producers to those particular countries because we will be more competitive in pricing.

We want to see that same principle that is being applied in the European markets as we move toward formally negotiating a free trade agreement with the EU as a whole, 27 other countries all under one organization. One of the reasons that the EU and those who are interested in the EU want to see a freer trade agreement with Canada is because they know we have already made this agreement with four countries in Europe. That is going to give those four countries a

competitive advantage in shipping their products and services into Canada. It will give them a competitive advantage over the other 27 countries in the EU because we have lowered the tariffs. So, it is in their best interests to pursue a freer trade agreement with us under the broad EU.

We apply the same principle to what is happening in Colombia. Colombia is pursuing free trade agreements with other countries and it is bringing them to a conclusion. That means producers and the providers of a variety of services in other countries are going to have a competitive advantage over Canadian producers as they market their goods and services into Colombia because tariffs on a wide range of products are going to be reduced. That means Canadian producers and Canadian workers are going to be at a disadvantage if we do not move on and complete this free trade deal.

It is worthy to note, and I brought this out to people with whom I met at Amnesty International and other groups who have raised issues about human rights and the past record of Colombia, that the past record of Colombia has not been an enviable one, to say the least, when it comes to human rights issues. However, its present administration has made great gains and shown great commitment to principles that are related to democracy, human rights and protections that we have come to expect, that is part of our own history, and that we have advanced around the world.

It is interesting that concerns have been raised about the free trade deal between Canada and Colombia, for instance on the labour side, yet we have signed a labour accord with Colombia that insists on both countries following the ILO, the International Labour Organization, rules, regulations and obligations related to trade and labour, which of course Canada already does. That covers everything from child labour to hours worked, to a full array of occupational health and safety issues that we would expect workers to have made available to them.

What is interesting here is that Colombia has signed agreements with European countries that have not even required those same labour agreements that we have. We have certain groups raising issues about Canada's agreement with Colombia but they never raised the issues with the European countries that have signed these agreements.

• (1210)

We feel it is very important that when a country is making progress, as Colombia is, that has to be acknowledged. The way we make sure progress continues is to get those countries to actually sign on the dotted line to certain levels of human rights and rights of workers and others. These signatures between Canada and Colombia require that independent organizations do the evaluation. There are sanctions attached to each country. Obviously, we do not think Canada will run afoul of these principles because we have embraced them for decades, but there are sanctions should the countries fall short of following through on their commitments.

*Government Orders*

There are 46 million people in Colombia who are gradually experiencing a raise in their standard of living. Is it being done perfectly and evenly? No. This is not a socialist experiment in utopia. This is the hard reality of day-to-day living where increased opportunities are being made available to individuals. Just as happens in Canada, over time the standard of living increases. We have seen it happen in China and India. Is it being done perfectly? No. Are there still areas of poverty? Yes. But overall, is the direction an upward one? Yes, it is. We want to see that direction continue.

Two-way trade in 2008 was something like \$1.35 billion between Canada and Colombia. There is always a good platform of trade. About 80% of that trade has to do with agriculture. Tariffs have been applied to Canadian industry; just in that one trading year, 2008, Canadian companies, and really, Canadian workers, paid about \$25 million worth of tariffs on products that they were selling into Colombia. There is a range of tariffs that we would hope to see reduced in this agreement. Some products are being taxed with a tariff, Canadian products going into Colombia and Colombian products coming into Canada, as low as 17%. Some of the tariff lines go as high as over 80%. This is being tacked on to a product either going into Colombia or coming into Canada. It is time to reduce them. We should eliminate as many of them as possible and open up the doors of opportunity for people in Colombia as well as for people in Canada.

That is why these deals are two-way streets. This is not a zero-sum game. History clearly shows that when these doors of opportunity are opened up, overall more jobs are created, more investment happens and more people benefit than if we did not open up these doors of opportunity.

I look forward to the ongoing debate and discussion about this particular free trade agreement. We look forward to advice on how it possibly could be made even better.

I do ask that if people raise objections, that they raise objections based on fact. I will be very frank in saying that some of the objections we have heard have been based on things which are simply not factual. I have heard people in this House raise objections, stating things such as this new free trade deal means if a person murders somebody, a trade unionist in Colombia, all the person would get is a fine. I have presented the truth on that, that it is utter hogwash, but I still have not heard a retraction. It is those types of arguments that are not based on fact that do not help the state of being of people who are looking forward to more opportunities, better job opportunities, better opportunities to sell their wares, to sell their services and to sell their agricultural products. I would ask that any objections that are raised be based on fact and that the advice that is given also be based on fact. We are open to that.

• (1215)

An enduring fact that remains before us as a goal is that as countries open up doors of opportunity through freer trade agreements, increased levels of prosperity are the result, whether we are talking about what I have referenced in terms of our European agreements or about the North American Free Trade Agreement. With respect to NAFTA, we now see about \$2 billion worth of trade a day crossing our borders. Certainly that agreement has its

difficulties and we are involved in some of them right now. That is another debate for another time, but we are involved.

The fact of the matter is that a free trade agreement based on rules offers great opportunity to citizens in the countries that are involved. We do not want Canadian producers, innovators, researchers and workers left at a competitive disadvantage by virtue of the fact that Colombia is striking free trade agreements with other nations.

We want the hopes and dreams of working people in Canada who have ideas, inventions and products they want to sell abroad materialize. We want the reality of an idea that goes into a product, its production and finally its sale, that chain of events to happen, along with the supply chain that goes with it. We want to see that happen, quite frankly, for Colombians also, and it can happen within the context of a free trade agreement like this one.

We open up the debate on this. I look forward to a good exchange as we go through the various readings of this bill. I look forward especially to increased prosperity for Canadians and the good people of Colombia.

**Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, why has the government not responded to the report of the House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade on the Canada-Colombia FTA? That report was provided to the House a year ago. Will the government respond thoroughly to that report? Specifically, will the government provide a full independent human rights assessment to the House before Bill C-23 is brought forward for a vote to send this bill to committee?

We as parliamentarians want to be constructive, but it requires that the government respect Parliament. It would benefit the debate if the government were to provide that assessment and that reply to what was a very thorough report before the vote on Bill C-23.

**Hon. Stockwell Day:** Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague mentioned assessment. We believe we have provided a thorough assessment, and it will be ongoing, of the human rights situation in Colombia. We will continue to do that as needed and as we should. If the member is talking about an assessment process similar to an environmental impact assessment, that is not something I see in the offering.

We need to do a day-by-day assessment of what the reality is in Colombia and also what the actual bill says. Articles 1603 and 1604 in the agreement are related to the labour side and talk about the fact that it is not just ILO standards, but we expect that Colombia, as it has indicated it will do, will live up to the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the labour standards included there. We have done an assessment on this. It covers everything from the right to association to free and collective bargaining, and rights related to health and safety in the workplace. Everything that would be expected of a nation that purports to live up to ILO standards is being assessed and has been assessed. Colombia's ambition and commitment to do it are there. Colombia is willing to sign a free trade agreement to show that it is doing it.

We will work with my colleague across the way and any other members in terms of continually assessing the situation related to human rights. We see it as a much improved one even over the last few years and we expect that to continue.

*Government Orders*

•(1220)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the minister keeps telling us that the human rights situation has improved, yet we know that so far, in 2009 alone, 17 union members have been killed. In 2008, the death toll was 46, and in 2007, it was 39. The numbers have clearly been going up, as the International Trade Union Confederation has confirmed. I asked the minister about this a few weeks ago. He keeps saying that things have improved, but we know that prominent government critics were under electronic surveillance. Not only have human rights taken a beating, but so have democratic rights.

As we all know, the U.S. government postponed signing this free trade agreement and did not endorse it. Earlier, the minister suggested that he could trust independent groups. That is exactly what the committee recommended: setting up an independent group and making a decision once human rights have been assessed. This agreement could be used to make things better. We should not sign it or bring it into force right away. We have to be sure that changes will happen in terms of human rights and that those changes will be long term.

**Hon. Stockwell Day:** Mr. Speaker, as I have said, in my opinion, there is no doubt this bill will improve the human rights situation. The Government of Colombia signed the agreement. It has said that it wants to respect the agreement, despite the situation described by my colleague. Of course, murders are committed everywhere around the world. It is very tragic anytime anyone is killed, regardless of whether they are a union member. We hope that the countries in question will bring forward sanctions against such individuals.

I would like to briefly add one other point. When we asked union leaders themselves questions about whether the agreement will damage or negatively affect the work environment, they said no and specifically indicated their support for the agreement. They said such an agreement would improve the situation.

[*English*]

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, what the minister just said is utter rubbish. The facts are very clear that the number of murders of human rights advocates and trade unionists has climbed over the last three years in Colombia. The number of disappearances, which are often murders where the bodies are never found, has climbed over the last few years. They are now at record levels of forced displacement. The human rights situation is catastrophic in Colombia. Those are the facts and that is why there is not a single reputable human rights organization that supports the government's line. There is not a single one.

In a report that was released just a few years ago, President Uribe was linked by U.S. intelligence as one of the most important Colombian narco-traffickers. There has been recent testimony stating that when President Uribe was governor, he was involved in planning a slaughter in the northern department of Antioquia.

Just last week there were allegations that secret police in Colombia spied on supreme court judges, opposition politicians, activists and journalists. These revelations come on top of an influence-peddling scandal involving the president's two sons and a

widening probe of the links between Uribe's allies in congress and right-wing paramilitary death squads.

This information is available to the minister. It is absurd that we are pushing forward with this agreement. What is next, a trade agreement with the Hells Angels?

•(1225)

**Hon. Stockwell Day:** Mr. Speaker, sadly, it is this type of hysterical hyperbole, for which the member has a reputation, that causes any kind of intellectual discussion to spiral down into rants and rambling.

The member read something that had come to light last week and the week before, and I think his colleague before him also mentioned it, on some internal intelligence issues and eavesdropping and things like that. That all took place, but in fairness, all I have asked for is balance in the debate. The member did not read the rest of that article, which said that the president not only had a number of people arrested for these offences but had publicly committed to absolutely dealing with those types of violations of privacy and other issues.

Now, whether he believes the president will follow through on that is up to him. It is interesting that he only brings out the narrow ideological positions, saying we should not have a free trade agreement because wrong things happen.

I recall in British Columbia, the province from which I come, when the NDP government was taken to task for scandal related to stealing money from people playing bingo charities. As much as we were opposed to that, at no time did we suggest that Canada should suspend all its free trade agreements because we had some of the NDP stealing from bingo charities in B.C.

We are not supporting any wrongdoing that is going on in any country. We are saying we have a lever here to push back wrongdoing through this trade agreement.

I wish the member opposite would be honest when he is bringing forward his shabby examples.

**Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-23, the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement implementation act.

The fact is that a year ago the House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade tabled its report on the free trade agreement with Colombia, and the government ought to have responded to this report from the trade committee out of respect to Parliament. It ought to have addressed some of the concerns from the House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade and responded specifically to the recommendation to have an independent, impartial and comprehensive human rights impact assessment. That would be out of respect for Conservative members of Parliament who serve on that committee, out of respect to New Democrat, Bloc and Liberal members who serve on that committee, and most importantly out of respect to the Canadians who have chosen this Parliament.

We believe that a full independent human rights assessment, as recommended by the committee, should be provided by the government to Parliament before we vote again on Bill C-23.

As we know, Colombia is a country that has faced years of internal conflict, where violence and human rights abuses have been perpetrated by paramilitary groups in the ongoing battles between the paramilitaries and guerrilla organizations. These battles have been funded largely by the narco-economy, by drug money.

In the last several years, the Colombian government has made significant progress under President Uribe towards achieving security for the Colombia people. There have been significant reductions in violence and human rights abuses, the general murder rate has fallen dramatically, and the International Crisis Group has noted, "since 2003 Colombia has witnessed a substantial decline in violence and kidnappings".

This increase in security has helped pave the way for a stronger Colombian economy. From 2002 to 2007, the Colombian economy has grown an average 5.3% per year.

[Translation]

Canada has benefited greatly from this economic growth. Our exports to Colombia have increased by an average of 14% per year during this period.

•(1230)

[English]

However, still the violence in Colombia and its root causes, poverty, the paramilitary groups and the illicit drug trade, remain a significant problem. It is a problem that in our trade and aid policy with Colombia Canada has a responsibility to engage and to partner with the Colombian government to address.

The recent progress has been impressive in many ways, but it is incomplete and fragile. If Colombia is to achieve sustainable progress in the areas of human rights going forward, it must expand its legitimate economy. A strong legitimate economy is required to fund the social infrastructure required to address these root causes of violence and to wean the Colombian people off the narco-economy.

Advancements and institution building must carry on, whether at the political, judicial or administrative levels. On this front we are concerned about the suggestion that President Uribe may seek a constitutional amendment to secure an unprecedented third consecutive term as president.

In its May 14 issue, *The Economist* magazine's article entitled "Uribe edges towards autocracy" noted that opponents to a third term argue:

...that the checks and balances in the constitution are designed for a four-year presidential term and that an erosion of the separation of powers under Mr Uribe would be aggravated by a third term.

*The Economist* magazine has in fact recognized President Uribe's accomplishments in the past, including that:

Many Colombians credit Mr Uribe with transforming their homeland from a near-failed state to a buoyant, if still violent, place.

The magazine concluded that:

### *Government Orders*

If he doesn't quit while he is still ahead, history may judge that Mr Uribe began to undo his own achievement.

This is important, because this constitutional amendment is of great concern to us. It is of great concern globally, in terms of governance in Colombia. Respect for the constitution is paramount for any democratic state, any country, so we are greatly concerned with this.

The stakes are too high to allow the recent progress under President Uribe to be undone. Paramilitary groups must continue to be demobilized. The living standards of the poor, particularly the rural poor, must be increased. Lasting progress cannot be made without legitimate economic opportunity or jobs for the impoverished Colombians, whose only opportunity sometimes will be the narco-economy and the paramilitary groups. Our efforts to improve the quality of life in Colombia must never lose sight of the need to grow Colombia's legitimate economy. We recognize that a growing economy requires trade and investment, and the right free trade agreement could help the people of Colombia diversify and strengthen their economy and their society.

Two-way Canada-Colombia merchandise trade in 2008 was valued at \$1.35 billion. Approximately half of that were exports, so Canada and Colombia are not exactly each other's biggest trading partners. However, by putting in place a free trade agreement with Colombia, one that has strong investment protection measures, our FTA could act as an international signal that Colombia can attract and leverage legitimate foreign investment from all over the world. It is a significant agreement to the people of Colombia, and it is important that we are sending the right signal.

With the right FTA, increased international economic engagement with Colombia and the potential for increased political pressure that comes with it could have the capacity to incentivize the Colombian government to pursue further reforms in support of increased security, human rights and economic growth. In other words, the right free trade agreement can help the Colombian government promote peace, stability and the rule of law.

•(1235)

As we are discussing the ratification of this FTA, it is important that we recognize what the role of Parliament is and what it is not in terms of trade agreements. It is our responsibility, as parliamentarians, to determine whether or not Bill C-23 does in fact represent a solid and sound free trade agreement. Does this agreement adequately address the legitimate concerns of Canadians regarding human rights abuses, labour laws and environmental standards? Are these measures relative to labour and the side agreements on labour and the environment robust enough?

We know, for example, that the labour co-operation agreement requires that each country protects the right of freedom to association, the right to collective bargaining, the abolition of child labour, the elimination of forced or compulsory labour and the elimination of discrimination. We know that this agreement includes a complaint and dispute resolution process. Would this process be legitimate and accountable? That is an important question that we need to consider as a parliament.

*Government Orders*

The government states that this process would, for example, allow a member of the public to file a complaint or to request an investigation if Canada or Colombia failed to, or were purported to have failed to, live up to the agreement. Furthermore, the agreement would create an independent review panel that could impose fines on the offending country of up to \$15 million. Whether these provisions are sufficient is a question that we, as parliamentarians, have to ask and analyze thoroughly.

As we study this legislation, we ought to hear from recognized experts in these fields in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the labour and environmental provisions in this FTA and its side agreement.

The Government of Canada, not the Parliament of Canada, negotiates trade agreements. The Government of Canada, not the Parliament of Canada, has negotiated this specific free trade agreement. It is not the role of parliamentarians to sit down with other countries to negotiate FTAs. Trade negotiations are a function of the government and our public officials, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. However, our job as parliamentarians is to carefully consider the trade agreements before us and to determine whether or not they are in our national interest and whether or not the trade agreement as written reflects our values.

Therefore, is the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement as the government has presented it, and which we are considering through Bill C-23, in Canada's best interest? Does it reflect our shared values, particularly in areas of human rights? Will it achieve greater peace, prosperity and security for Colombians? Will it help us, as Canadians, partner with the Colombian people to develop and build their economy?

The U.S., our largest trading partner, has yet to ratify their FTA with Colombia. It may in fact seek a renegotiation. The Obama administration has indicated an openness to a free trade agreement with Colombia, but that may require a renegotiation and more robust agreements on labour and the environment. How would this impact our trade position vis-à-vis Colombia and the U.S.? Should this affect the timing of our consideration of Bill C-23?

These are questions that must guide our deliberations during this debate today. The Conservative government has still not formally responded to the report of June 2008, a year ago, of the House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade. I repeat what I said earlier to the minister, and in my remarks, that out of respect for all members of Parliament on that committee the government should respond before it expects us to vote on this.

The issue of violence in Colombia merits special attention and using the resources available to us, and we parliamentarians ought to consider and assess the expected impact of this FTA on the human rights situation in Colombia. Proponents say it could help, that in fact weaning the Colombian people off the narco-economy with real economic opportunities is essential to moving forward.

● (1240)

Some of the opponents, including some of the human rights organizations, say that it will not help and that it could make the situation worse. We have a responsibility to drill down on the facts and not be guided by either the ideology that free trade at all costs is

the word of the day or that every FTA is bad, which the position sometimes taken by the New Democrats. We must be guided by the real concerns expressed to us by the human rights community, the labour movement and others, and the concerns and support from people in the agricultural community and the business community who see this as being an important opportunity for Canada.

Given recent developments, the trade committee should go to Colombia, see the situation on the ground first-hand, meet with the Colombian government and have these discussions. We should be expressing ourselves clearly on the matter of the proposed constitutional amendment that is being discussed now to extend President Uribe's government to a third term.

As parliamentarians, we must be satisfied that this FTA and its side agreement will enable and not hinder progress on human rights, labour rights and the environment before we can support its ratification. As we proceed with our deliberations, we must be very careful not to confound the issues of commercial trade with development aid. As parliamentarians, we must be clear that pursuing free trade with Colombia would not reduce the Government of Canada's responsibility to provide development aid to that country. We also need to continue through CIDA to invest in and help the Colombian people. Therefore, a combination of trade policy and aid policy is important. Trade does not reduce the importance of aid to the people of Colombia.

CIDA has an important record in Colombia in terms of building institutions and providing access to basic social services for internally displaced persons and supporting efforts to promote human rights, particularly for children. These activities must be supported and continued.

Canadians are frustrated and I share their frustration with recent changes to CIDA's aid program in which Canada's Conservative government has blatantly tying aid dollars to its economic and political goals. It offends our shared values as Canadians that the Conservative government is in the process of withdrawing development aid from some of the poorest countries in Africa in order to redirect these moneys to more developed economies in Latin America. It offends us because it is contrary to the belief that the primary purpose of development aid is to help the poorest of the poor and to build their economies and societies.

However, as I said before, we must not confuse commercial trade with development aid. Increased economic engagement can play an important role in helping developing nations achieve greater and lasting prosperity but trade alone is not enough. It can and does usually play a positive role but it is not enough.



*Government Orders*

As parliamentarians, we can challenge this change and policy at CIDA but we must be careful not to take aim at the wrong target. Misplaced development aid is not a reason to oppose an increase in trade relations. As parliamentarians, we must oppose any attempt by our colleagues to evaluate this trade agreement purely on the basis of narrow partisan or ideological reasons. It is just too important a signal for the people of Colombia. We must take this very seriously and put aside partisan and ideological differences and ensure we are considering the facts and the views of the experts. We need to take the time to do this.

In the U.S., the Obama administration has moved toward a certain level of openness toward a free trade agreement but with the potential to renegotiate and to exact stronger and more robust conditions around labour and the environment. We need to ensure we are in communication with our largest trading partner, the Americans, to understand fully where they are going on this and to ensure that any FTA we negotiate with Colombia is at least as robust on the issues of human rights and the environment as ultimately the potential agreement between Colombia and the Americans.

● (1245)

The Liberal Party believes in the principles of free trade. We believe in economic engagement as potentially strengthening the engagement on human rights. It was the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau that opened up, strengthened and deepened economic relations with China. The only thing that Prime Minister Trudeau and Richard Nixon agreed on was the opening up of China. It was the Trudeau government, Mr. Chrétien's government and Mr. Martin's government particularly that deepened economic ties with China.

It has been the Conservative government that has damaged those ties with China, supposedly on the basis of human rights, but because of the Conservatives' mismanagement of our relationship with China, we actually have less influence on Chinese human rights now than we did four years ago and have also lost significant economic opportunities, particularly on energy and clean energy trade. We need to be consistent and the Conservatives have not been consistent in terms of economic engagement with China. They are taking a completely different approach with Colombia.

We will ask the tough questions on human rights when it comes to the FTA with Colombia. We will carefully examine this legislation to ensure this FTA or any FTA that we support with the Government of Colombia will protect and strengthen the human rights of the people of Colombia and help protect their environment.

We will do that as a responsible party. The Liberal Party of Canada believes in economic engagement and believes in defending environmental protection and fundamental human rights.

**Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the member's speech. I thought it was very measured and I appreciate the comments of the hon. member who is the critic for trade matters in his party. I want some clarification on two things he mentioned.

First, he suggested that the committee might visit Colombia as a further discussion on the free trade agreement. I think the member is familiar with the fact that the committee did visit Colombia about six months ago and tabled a report following that.

He also talked about the report that was tabled and wondered why there was not a follow-up in the House and why the government minister was not asked to respond to that report. I want to note that at the time of the tabling of that report, each party that was a signatory to that report filed a dissenting report, which is why it was not responded to at the time. It was not retabled in the House in this session.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Mr. Speaker, a couple of issues were raised by the chairman of the House of Commons international trade committee.

First, in terms of the failure of the government to respond to the report, I do believe the government ought to respond to all the points raised by all the parties in that report and it has not done that. In particular, the government has not provided the independent assessment of human rights requested in that report and that should be done.

In terms of engaging the Government of Colombia and potentially going to Colombia, we have an international trade committee that has a new set of members. I was not on the international trade committee when it went to Colombia the last time. In fact, most of the members of the international trade committee who are being asked to consider this FTA now were not with the group that went to Colombia the last time. Therefore, for us to deliberate effectively, I think that is important.

We also have the issue of President Uribe's potential constitutional amendment to provide himself with a third term. We do have concerns about that and what it would do to the reputation of his government internationally and to governance in Colombia.

● (1250)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the Liberal member of one of the recommendations made in the report that the Liberal Party voted for:

The committee recommends that the Government of Canada draw on the work of the organization Rights and Democracy to give an independent body the mandate to conduct studies regarding the impact on rights and the environment when it is negotiating economic agreements with countries at risk, as in the case of the agreement with Colombia.

The committee also recommended the creation of an independent body to evaluate the agreement. It also recommended that no free trade agreements be signed or implemented until all the recommendations are implemented.

From what the critic for international trade has said, am I to understand that the Liberal Party wants to ignore the recommendations that they supported when the report was tabled?

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Mr. Speaker, I asked the minister this question and I asked why the government refused to respond to this report and to ask for an independent assessment because it is very important to our committee and to our members.

Therefore, I agree with the member.

*Government Orders**[English]*

I do not understand why the government has not taken that report seriously and replied. That is why I asked the minister if he would provide that assessment to the House before we have a vote on this. We would benefit from that and it would be out of respect for Parliament. The international trade committee made that recommendation and the government has not only failed to respond to the report but has failed to provide the independent assessment.

I believe the government ought to do that out of respect for Parliament and it should ensure that these concerns are addressed fully.

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition was roundly condemned for saying that he would support the Canada-Colombia trade deal for all the reasons that have been cited so far in the House.

I listened very carefully to my colleague, the member for Kings—Hants, and he appeared to be saying that the government needed to table a response. However, thousands of Canadians have written to the Leader of the Opposition saying that the Liberal Party should not rubber stamp the Conservatives' approach to a trade agreement with Colombia given the appalling human rights situation there.

Is the member for Kings—Hants saying that if the government does not step back and allow for that independent and impartial human rights assessment to take place before there is any further movement on this trade deal that the Liberal caucus will be voting against the trade deal at second reading?

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Mr. Speaker, the fact is we will be asking the hard questions of the government. We will be defending the human rights and labour rights of the people of Colombia.

My party and my leader are absolutely committed to defending human rights. In fact, the Liberal leader has spent a lifetime defending human rights and takes these issues very seriously. Naturally, we will be demanding the answers to the questions we have for the Colombian government. We will be pushing the government to provide that independent assessment. That is exactly what I said. We will continue to push the government to take these human rights issues seriously and to ensure that the impact of this FTA will ultimately strengthen the rights and economy of the Colombian people through economic engagement.

We will ensure that the government does not ignore these rights issues. Later this week, we will be meeting with the foreign minister for the government of Colombia and President Uribe's administration. We will be making it very clear that we want the tough questions answered before we are willing to support the agreement. We certainly will not be rubber-stamping anything.

Unlike the NDP, we are potentially able to form a Government of Canada. As such, we do not rubber-stamp things. We ask the tough questions in opposition and take a responsible position because we can form a government, unlike the globophobic socialist Luddites in the New Democratic Party. They are opposed to every free trade agreement, anywhere at any time, because they do not know how to manage an economy.

● (1255)

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Burnaby—New Westminster for his defence. Contrary to what the member said, New Democrats are in favour of fair trade.

Given the track record of the Conservatives on human rights and the fact that they refuse to support the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, what confidence does the member have that the Conservatives will actually take a stand on human rights? We need to take this prior to signing the agreement.

**Hon. Scott Brison:** Mr. Speaker, what I find appalling is the inconsistency of the Conservatives on trade and human rights issues and the relationship between economic engagement and human rights. They have completely damaged and destroyed the Canada-China economic relationship, supposedly on the basis of human rights. However, they have not been as assiduous with Colombia.

The fact is we have to be consistent with all of our trade agreements. We have to defend human rights. We have to ensure that economic engagement goes hand in hand with environmental and human rights engagement.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, we are now debating Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia.

I would like to go back a year to when we had just returned from Colombia. The entire committee went to Colombia. We were able to meet with government representatives, members of civil society, unions and human rights advocates. We were able to determine that there was a significant problem in terms of human rights. People on site, including Canadian entrepreneurs, flogged their own interests, if I may put it that way, in order to do more business in Colombia.

There is no denying it. When we jumped on the globalization bandwagon, everyone wanted to go global. Everyone wants access to foreign markets and foreigners want access to our market. The reason for this mad dash in recent years was to take advantage of conditions that are less stringent than those in their country of origin. Such conditions may also exist in Colombia. There is an enormous difference in the economic, social and working conditions, which has an impact on what it costs businesses to produce goods there as opposed to here.

Obviously, the main goal in entering into a free trade agreement is to do business. In a perfect world, when we do business with people, the idea is to reach an agreement that is favourable to all parties. This economic agreement is ideal in that everyone can benefit from a free trade agreement. In this instance, trade is clearly not the main concern, because it is on the rise and the agreement is not even in effect yet.

*Government Orders*

As I said earlier, when we were in Colombia working and hearing testimony, we learned that the government had finished negotiating with Colombia and was ready to sign this agreement. The committee had not even completed its trip, which had been organized so that the members could get a clearer picture of the situation and come up with recommendations for the government, and already the government was taking an undemocratic, disrespectful attitude toward the committee.

What could we do at the time? We carried on with our work and returned from Colombia. We tabled a report, analyzed it, amended it and submitted very clear recommendations that were also endorsed by the Liberal Party. Now we get the feeling that the Liberals want to back away from those recommendations.

Earlier, the Liberal member was talking as though he aspires to power. That is the difference. When we do not aspire to power, we at least have the power to defend our values, and we can defend them all around the world as well as at home. The Liberals seem to want to change their behaviour because they aspire to power. But believing in human values means standing up for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our society and in societies with which we want to sign free trade agreements.

I am confused and wondering quite a bit about the Liberal Party's core values in this context.

● (1300)

We know very well that terrible things are still happening and are not growing less frequent, despite what the international trade minister says. Trade unionists are still being assassinated, and people are still being forcibly displaced. Speaking of forced population movements, we visited a place called Soacha when we were in Colombia and met people who told us about their experiences. It was frightful. People are told they have to go, and if they fail to respond to the threats, some are killed. That has often happened in Colombia.

I have met the Colombian ambassador on several occasions and remember very well what he told us: Colombia is not a post-conflict country. Plainly put, this means that the conflict is virtually never-ending. We found out just a few weeks ago that its secret services were electronically eavesdropping on people opposed to the regime, trade unionists and even judges who had passed sentences on certain individuals, such as paramilitaries or drug traffickers with possible ties to the government. In addition to trampling on human rights, the Uribe government disregards democratic rights as well.

This is what the Canadian government wants to put its stamp of approval on. It is appalling that a possible free trade agreement is not being used as a lever to get the Colombian government not only to say it wants to quickly improve the situation but actually do so. That was one of the recommendations in the report, which wanted an independent body established to assess the situation and determine how human rights and the rights of working people and trade unionists were progressing. This independent assessment was supposed to let the government know when things had actually improved and it could proceed.

I think that trade with Canada could be very good for Colombia and its economy. At present, though, the free trade agreement is still not in force, and what is important to the Canadian government is

not improving or increasing our trade. The most important thing in its eyes is investment. Unfortunately, though, the foreign investment promotion and protection agreement, which is strangely similar to NAFTA chapter 11, is bad for Colombians. It is pretty obvious why.

As we know, private companies can sue governments. If Canadian investors in Columbia think they might lose money as a result of improvements to working conditions or environmental requirements, they could sue the Government of Columbia. That would automatically put a damper on improvements to working conditions, human rights and the environment. This is what the government is primarily interested in.

The Bloc Québécois says no to this kind of agreement. We have been saying for a long time that we should try to protect the investments our companies make in other countries, but not at the expense of the people who live there.

● (1305)

In this regard, we find the situation deplorable, and the Bloc clearly cannot support this bill. The government should redo its homework in this area and on investment agreements.

A number of aspects are of great concern to us as well. Among other things, there is the way the government conducted itself in formulating the free trade agreement. Earlier, I said that the government had behaved undemocratically, since, to all intents and purposes, it signed an agreement without waiting for the recommendations. They are very clear. All those advising us strongly to put pressure on the government to accept these recommendations are concerned about human rights conditions and want to ensure that everyone wins with this agreement. I have no doubt that this would be possible for men and women of good will. This is why I appeal to the members of the Liberal Party and of the government so all this may improve and tangibly so for the benefit of the Colombian people.

Trade between Canada and Colombia is very limited, as will be the benefits when this agreement is concluded. As I was saying, it is not necessarily just trade that is involved. It is primarily investments and essentially mining investments. Canadian mining companies have no responsibility in this regard, as we well know. We are referring not only to Canadian companies, but to foreign mining companies that register in Canada in order to do business elsewhere, in countries where environmental laws are not so strict and restrictions accordingly are relatively weak. We believe that these companies should be responsible for their actions in environmental terms in the other countries and even that the government could take steps and impose sanctions against them.

*Government Orders*

I was saying earlier that such provisions on investment in a country whose labour and environmental protection laws are, at best, uncertain are especially dangerous. This is particularly true in that this is still a zone of conflict, as was confirmed in my conversation with the ambassador. This is not yet a post-conflict country. A number of areas of the country have never been developed because of the war. The situation is especially fragile in these areas. In some sectors, large numbers of people have been displaced because of the civil war. Encouraging foreign investment in such violence-ridden areas could set things off, so to speak.

As we know, and it cannot be said often enough, Colombia is the worst catastrophe in the hemisphere in terms of human rights. The country has some four million displaced persons today. This is the worst record in the world after Sudan. Assassinations of union members are legion, and most of them go unpunished. There are many allegations of collusion between the Uribe government and the rightist militia. Many NGOs and witnesses have confirmed that. The Colombian government is responsible for a number of these violations. This is the worst possible time to give up the use of economic means to heighten pressure on the Colombian government.

• (1310)

The government keeps on repeating that this agreement includes a side agreement on labour and another on the environment. However, those agreements are clearly deficient.

We deplore the Liberals' about-face on this issue. Since their new leader took over, the Liberals have gone from a position of prudence and scepticism regarding this agreement to one of blind support for it. If the Liberals really want to restore Canada's image abroad and restore our reputation as a champion of human rights, they must act consistently with their claims and reject this agreement.

The Liberal reasoning for supporting this agreement is at best misleading and hypocritical. Based on Liberal logic, Canada should engage in free trade with all countries that are known to violate human rights in order to be able to influence them. When so many credible human rights organizations are asking us to reject the agreement, this should raise red flags for all responsible parliamentarians.

I therefore call on all parliamentarians to vote against Bill C-23 and reject the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia. I think this is a matter of human dignity.

I would now like to propose an amendment to Bill C-23. I propose, seconded by the hon. member for Hochelaga, that the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

the House refuse 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 the agreement while the Standing Committee on International Trade was considering the matter, thereby demonstrating its disrespect for democratic institutions.

• (1315)

**Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my Bloc Québécois colleagues a question.

I am surprised that they do not wish to support Bill C-23 because this bill would help Canadians and Colombians.

Free trade was a force in Canada's creation. In 1867, and even before that, Canadian entrepreneurs were not prevented by any country from exporting their goods throughout the world. Canada became rich through free trade. We now want to tear down barriers and allow our entrepreneurs to continue to sell their goods throughout the world, in Colombia in this instance. We also want Colombians to benefit from free trade because it has been proven over the years that countries that engage in free trade are generally more prosperous and peaceful. In fact, free trade enables people from different nations to travel to different countries, to come to know one another and to live in a better world.

Why do our Bloc Québécois friends want to prevent companies such as Bombardier or SNC-Lavalin from creating jobs in Quebec and Canada? Why do they wish to prevent Colombians from prospering in a better world?

**Mr. Serge Cardin:** Mr. Speaker, I am glad that the member considers Bloc Québécois members to be his friends, but quite frankly, no friend of mine would support this kind of free trade agreement.

I believe that Quebeckers have good business sense. They are business people and they know how to do business. Some are already doing business with Colombia. But this free trade agreement also seeks to legitimize an investment agreement that bears a striking resemblance to chapter 11 and gives certain irresponsible companies the right to do business in Colombia and take advantage of labour rights, human rights and environmental rights, then take risks if ever the Colombian government tries to improve things with respect to human, labour or environmental rights.

There are a number of irresponsible Canadian companies doing business in Colombia. I am not saying that they are all irresponsible, but some of them are. We know that globalization has made it possible to produce items more cheaply elsewhere than at home. We have nothing against trade—it is happening already. People can continue to negotiate and make deals. However, this free trade agreement could have been a meaningful tool to help the Colombian government make progress on various fronts: human, labour and environmental rights. As the committee recommended in its report, we should not go forward with an official relationship with Colombia until we see continued improvement.

• (1320)

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague from Sherbrooke. I totally agree with him. That is not often the case, but today it is. He spoke very well.

*Government Orders*

I have two questions for him. First, we just had an incredibly complicated explanation from the Liberal Party. What it proposed to do was not clear. We do not know if they will vote yes or no. We know that it very clearly stated in public that it wants to vote in favour of the agreement. Does it not make sense that, if we accept what the member from Kings—Hants just said, all Liberal members should vote in favour of the amendment just proposed by the member from Sherbrooke?

Second, considering all the murders and killings in Colombia as well as the very close ties between the administration and paramilitary forces, is signing this agreement not tantamount to giving a stamp of approval to the Uribe government?

**Mr. Serge Cardin:** Mr. Speaker, I believe so. It is obviously giving the government free reign. It is like telling the Uribe government that we will complain a bit in public about what it is doing, but we will still say that things are improving. Clearly, things have been done. But as the International Trade Union Confederation said again recently, there has been no improvement despite the figures that have been released. We have only to look at the number of trade unionists who have been assassinated. Seventeen have been killed this year to date. In 2007, there were 39. In 2008, there were 46. Is this what we would call an improvement?

It is too bad about the Liberal Party. As I said earlier, and as the Liberal critic for international trade made clear, they are close to power. When they were clearly in opposition and had no hope of coming to power, the Liberals were able to promote human values and stand up for human rights.

Is it because the Liberal Party is close to power that these values have become negotiable? Does that mean that if you want to be in power, you have to be mean and nasty? It is just the opposite. People in power should be good and should ensure that human rights, workers' rights and environmental rights are respected. I believe that people who aspire to power should have these core values and should say no to this agreement. They should not vote for Bill C-23, but should try instead to improve it and to implement the recommendations made by the Standing Committee on International Trade.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Mr. Speaker, does my colleague from Sherbrooke think that the Liberal Party will go back to the initial position it took within the Standing Committee on International Trade under the former Liberal leader? Like the NDP and the Bloc Québécois, the Liberals took the position that we should not go ahead with this agreement until there had been a full, independent assessment of the human rights situation in Colombia. That was the situation under the former leader. The new leader has really shifted the Liberal Party to the right.

Does the member for Sherbrooke think that the Liberal Party should go back to its initial position and vote for the amendment he has proposed?

• (1325)

**Mr. Serge Cardin:** Mr. Speaker, I hope the Liberal Party will not only return to its senses but also to its better self in regard to what is happening. Absolutely nothing has changed since last year at this time when we were in Colombia. The Liberal members saw with their own eyes that it makes absolutely no sense to support the

Colombian government and what it is doing through a free trade agreement.

I hope that parliamentarians and the Liberal members will return to their better selves. I do not think that the prospect of returning to power soon should change the basic values of members. I hope that they will return to their senses and, as the NDP member said, that they will support our amendment to Bill C-23.

[*English*]

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the amendment on behalf of the New Democratic Party and our leader.

The amendment presented by the Bloc today would simply stop the process around the bill. There is no doubt the House should not endorse in any way what has gone on in Colombia.

Over the next few minutes, I will talk about some of the myths that have been put forward by the Conservatives and their Liberal supporters around the situation in Colombia, citing some of what is actually going on and about which Canadians need to know. A lot of Canadians are already aware of this, which is why thousands of letters, emails and phone calls have gone to the Liberal leader's office since he announced he would support the Conservatives, propping them up, on the bill.

Bill C-23, the Canada-Colombia free trade act, has been characterized by some people as the Hell's Angels trade act. That is not too far from the truth when we look at the links between the administration and the president with murderous paramilitary thugs and drug traffickers, going back many years, which is a matter of public record. I will come back to that in a moment.

The minister rose in the House and said that he wanted a fact-based discussion. Over 20 minutes, he did not present a single fact to back up his argument. In fact, he made the ludicrous argument that somehow labour leaders supported this agreement. That is absolutely absurd. There is not a legitimate trade union in Colombia or a single trade union in Canada that supports this deal. All reputable human rights organizations have clearly said that this is a very bad idea.

It is hard to have a debate when only one side presents the facts. The NDP will present the facts as will members of the Bloc. The other side provides personal attacks and personal invective from the minister and the Liberal opposition to the people oppose to this agreement, but they have not brought forward a single fact or argument.

Let us start dealing with the facts.

We heard the minister say that somehow things were getting better in Colombia. He clearly has not been addressing the facts or looking at the evidence.

As my colleague from Sherbrooke just mentioned, the number of killings of human rights advocates, trade unionists, people simply working for a better quality of life for themselves and their co-workers, has climbed over the last three years. That is an undeniable fact.

### *Government Orders*

There has been an increase in forced displacements. Forced displacement is when armed paramilitary thugs force poor peasant farmers off the land to take refuge in barrios and shanty towns elsewhere in Colombia. That property is then taken over by those murderous paramilitary thugs and they can sell off the land.

A special report was presented recently by the Center for Popular Research, Education and Policy on the number of extrajudicial killings. The report says that in 2008 there were 580 victims of extrajudicial executions. Members of the army are allegedly responsible for 165 of those executions, which essentially means cold-blooded murders, and 372 were the responsibility of paramilitary groups. This study shows that the number of extrajudicial executions has doubled over the last three years.

We have seen an increase in the number of murders of human rights advocates and trade unionists. We have seen an increase in forced displacement, violent displacement, the robbery of land from poor peasants. I imagine the Conservative government is not too concerned about that as long as they are poor.

● (1330)

We see a doubling of extrajudicial executions. We also have substantial increases in the number of disappearances. That has been profiled by many journalists. Those disappearances are really murders, but they never find the bodies. There has been a steady and undeniable increase in the number of murders, disappearances, executions, cold-blooded murder, and forced displacement. That is undeniable.

The idea that somehow things are getting better in Colombia can only be put forward by people who do not have a hand on the facts or who simply do not pay attention. If they are not paying attention, then they very clearly do not have an understanding of the situation on the ground in Colombia.

We then have to look at what human rights groups are saying. I can cite report after report. I only have 20 minutes today, but I know my colleagues in the NDP caucus, as we do our homework, will be bring forward citations and quotes from the many human rights organization that have condemned this. Unfortunately the minister, who I like personally, simply did not bring forward a single useful fact or argument to back up his case today,

I will cite the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, in its recent report entitled, "Making a Bad Situation Worse: An Analysis of the Text of the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement", said:

Colombian civil society and human rights organizations have been clear: they do not want this agreement...The terms of the trade agreement also raise serious human rights concerns for vulnerable populations in the context of Colombia's conflict economy. The FTA will hit small-scale farmers with low-price competition, and may further expose indigenous people, Afro-Colombians and rural dwellers to land grabs by Canadian mining companies equipped with powerful new investor rights, but no binding responsibilities. Introducing such provisions into this troubled context will chill democratic dissent and tilt the scales further against already disadvantaged and victimized groups.

We have talked a bit about the forced displacement, and this is exactly to what this report from very reputable Canadian organizations is referring.

It goes on to state:

The side agreements on Labour and the Environment do not address these threats; to the contrary the latter creates perverse incentives for weak regulation. The agreement makes a bad situation worse.

So much for the pretension from the Liberals that somehow this makes the situation better. So much for the pretension from the Conservatives that somehow they actually care about human rights.

Very clearly this report contradicts both of them. Unfortunately I cannot cite all of it, although I wish I could. However, I will read parts of it into the record because Canadians need to know what those who understand the situation in Colombia on the ground have said. It states:

Importantly, the Colombian government is mired in a growing political scandal for its close links to paramilitary death squads that have terrorized the countryside and even threatened Canada's embassy in Bogotá. Increasing numbers of President Uribe's close political allies, including the chief of security, personal advisors, and members of Congress have been tied to paramilitary activities. The Colombian government is, thus, looking for international backing.

The Conservatives, because they are ideologically great friends of right-wingers, wherever they may be on the planet, are tying in Canada's so-called trade objectives into trying to endorse the Uribe government.

What are they endorsing? Earlier when the minister was in the House, I started to talk a bit about some of the reports that have come out, the evidence and testimony, which are available to the minister and any Conservative member of Parliament. They talk about what has gone on and what have been the past links and the current links with President Uribe.

I read into the record at that time part of an article from the *Washington Post*, and the minister then said that I should have read further. He pretended somehow that President Uribe was concerned about the revelations that secret police in Colombia had spied on supreme court judges, opposition politicians, activists and journalists. The latest revelations on top of that are the influence peddling scandal involving the president's two sons, Tomás and Jerónimo, and a widening probe of the links between Uribe's allies in congress and right-wing paramilitary death squads, these murderous thugs who the Conservatives seem to want to be hand in hand with.

● (1335)

If we read further on in this *Washington Post* article, we actually get the response of the president, and it is not at all what the minister pretended, again either because he has not read the article, does not know his facts or has not done his homework. I am not sure why.

However, for whatever reason, he neglected to see that what actually happened is that the president has called these investigations politically motivated. In other words, far from this idea that President Uribe has stepped forward and wants to make things clean with the influence peddling scandals involving his sons, the links with his top aides and paramilitary organizations, no, it is quite the contrary. President Uribe has actually denounced the few prosecutors who are still trying, making a real effort, to maintain the rule of law in Colombia.

This is what opposition leader Rafael Pardo said about the Uribe regime:

This is a regime that uses intelligence to co-opt political rights. How can you have political guarantees when the intelligence service is following politicians during their campaigns?

*Government Orders*

That is the responsive Uribe regime.

However, it goes back much further than just last week, when these latest scandals erupted. We have had testimony and evidence presented about President Uribe's involvement with paramilitaries well before that, going back to articles that came out in February:

In testimony presented last February before the Office of the Attorney General of Colombia, the ex paramilitary member Francisco Enrique Villalba Hernández claimed that Colombian President Alvaro Uribe and his brother, Santiago, participated in the planning of a massacre which took place in the northern part of the region of Antioquia, according to a copy of the testimony obtained by *El Nuevo Herald*.

Part of this confession was used by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to condemn Colombia for the slaughter which occurred in the village of El Aro in 1997.

These are allegations, evidence, testimony that have come forward just in the last few months that the Conservatives could have looked at in regard to what the standing committee has already said, which is we cannot move further on this. We have to have a comprehensive human rights assessment of what is going on in Colombia. This is public domain. It is not rocket science. We just do our homework.

Perhaps most telling of all, and this goes back a few years, is evidence that has been presented to date. Because President Uribe has not gone to trial yet, there has not been, through that process, a determination of his exact involvement.

However, this is from U.S. intelligence. The Defense Intelligence Agency of the United States in Colombia produced a list of the most important Colombian narco-traffickers. This was in 1991. This list was forced out through access to information just a few years ago, but that information would be available to any Conservative who had actually decided to look into whether or not this makes any sense at all, namely proceeding with a trade agreement with Colombia.

The report lists Alvaro Uribe as 82 on the list of the top 100 Colombian narco-traffickers. I should say that this report, which was declassified, was verified by other agencies. So it is the Defense Intelligence Agency of the United States but also verified with other agency information. It refers to Alvaro Uribe as a Colombian politician and senator dedicated to collaboration with the Medellín cartel at high government levels. It states that Uribe was linked to a business involved in narcotics activities in the U.S. It goes on to say that Uribe had worked for the Medellín cartel and was a close personal friend of Pablo Escobar.

Now, many people who have followed the appalling careers of drug traffickers know the name Pablo Escobar. I am sure many of the Conservative MPs would know this, as well, had they done their homework, and had they done their research.

● (1340)

It continues on to state that, and this is President Uribe, he had participated in Escobar's political campaign to win the position of assistant parliamentarian to Jorge Ortega. Uribe had been one of the politicians from the senate who had attacked all forms of the extradition treaty.

When this information came out, it could have been available to any Conservative. The Colombian government tried to do a full court press. It has a very slick public relations machine, but when

checking facts we can look beyond the public relations machine. But it is very interesting that the public relations machine has never addressed the issue of President Uribe's very clear links with Pablo Escobar and the Medellín cartel. However, it is out there. This is evidence in testimony.

We should not be signing a trade agreement with Colombia. We should be bringing President Uribe to trial. That evidence should be weighed by a competent judge. These are the kinds of things we should be doing. Conservatives say they are against murderers and drug traffickers, but as long as they are in another country, Conservatives are willing to line up for photo ops with them, cut ribbons with them, and sign a trade agreement with them. It is absolutely appalling that with this body of evidence we would see the Conservatives trying to push through this agreement. This is absolutely appalling.

Where does it leave us? We have an amendment now coming forward. The Liberals, to be consistent to their position under their former leader, should be voting for the amendment to kill this agreement because there is no doubt that this is not in the interest of Canada. It is not even in the interest of Colombia for the reasons I cited earlier. The report of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation is very clear what the impact would be on rural Colombians.

The NDP has been calling for increased development aid because quite frankly, CIDA's work in Colombia, which I have seen firsthand, has actually helped to address some of those needs that have come forward. Development aid obviously is something that we need to continue to do. It is beyond the control of the Uribe regime, but it is important work that does address the dire needs of many of the refugees who are in shanty towns and bidonvilles across Colombia.

The idea that somehow this is tied to Canadian prosperity again shows to what extent the Conservatives simply have not done their homework. Most of the bilateral agreements we have signed have actually led to a reduction in exports. Following the signatures of these trade agreements, exports fall. Now why would that happen? It is because unlike every other country in the world, around our export-driven economy, we do not invest to provide any sort of product promotional support. The NDP has been calling for this for some time. The amounts that we provide in supports to our exports compared to that of other major countries is ridiculously small. As a result of that there is simply no economic argument that could be made.

The human rights argument, the labour rights argument, and the argument of those in rural areas of Colombia who will bear the brunt if Canada provides a rubber stamp for a regime that is scandal-ridden and a regime where there is very clear evidence and testimony of links between the paramilitaries and of the Uribe administration is something obviously that this Parliament has to look at and has to then evaluate.

*Government Orders*

Finally, I would like to read a brief quotation from Stephen Dudley's book about paramilitary violence. This is what is said about one of the many massacres. I cited some of the evidence of the connection between the regime and the paramilitaries. Just one paragraph from this book will show Canadians what is actually going on in Colombia:

After they killed my father and my brothers, they kept going. In another house, they killed a couple that was watching TV. One guy who went outside to ask about his son was also killed. A little boy who was carrying some food to his dad got it as well. A couple of girls that were in the street were also murdered. Everyone they saw they killed.

The NDP is saying no to this trade agreement because we believe the regime has blood on its hands and Canada deserves better.

• (1345)

**Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I compliment the member on his speech.

I would like to ask him to outline some of the transgressions that have been taking place with respect to the ELN and the other paramilitaries, and the relationship between the government of Colombia, the ELN and the paramilitaries, as well as the remaining members of FARC that are still in existence.

I would also like the member to talk about the issue of drugs. Drugs fueled the narco-terrorist state that Colombia became, and still is, to some extent. Do we not need to have a change here at home? Does the west not need to change also? If there were not a demand, there would not be a supply.

We make demands on countries such as Colombia, Central American countries and Mexico, but do we not also need to change our demand here in Canada? The federal government should start adopting harm reduction strategies that work, which would reduce demand here and have a positive impact upon improving social conditions in countries such as Colombia.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Mr. Speaker, the NDP has been in favour of harm reduction strategies for some time. We have been the foremost promoter in the House on that issue, so that answers the second question.

As far as his first question is concerned, the ELN and FARC are guerrilla organizations in western Colombia. No one in their right mind suggests signing a trade agreement with FARC or ELN guerrillas. They have kidnapped and murdered many people, so why would the Conservatives recommend signing a trade agreement with paramilitaries on the other side who murder and trade in drugs? It makes absolutely no sense.

At home they say that if somebody murders or traffics in hard drugs, they should pay the time, but abroad, the Conservatives are all saying, "That is fine. That is a great activity. We will sign a trade agreement with you". It is disgusting. It is inappropriate. The links are very clear and the Conservatives should be ashamed of what they are trying to put forward in the House today.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the following of the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster, who was there last year in Colombia.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Serge Cardin:** You see, Mr. Speaker, he is really listening. I ask him a question and you have to call him to order.

I want to ask the following of the NDP member, who is always true to form and gave an excellent speech.

He was there when we went to Colombia to meet people in companies, trade unions and human rights organizations. What was his reaction when he heard the government had finished its negotiations and for all practical purposes had reached an agreement with Colombia that was ready to be signed. This was obviously bad for the work the committee was doing. I would like to know what he thought and especially how he reacted at that point to the Conservative government.

• (1350)

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Sherbrooke for his question.

We did go to Colombia and met trade unionists and human rights advocates. These are very brave people who have often received death threats. Occasionally there have been attempts to kill them or members of their families. They all said that this would do nothing to improve the situation in Colombia. As I said earlier, it will only make things worse. That is crystal clear.

Insofar as government assistance is concerned, CIDA is doing good work with limited resources, as we saw in Soacha. If the government is sincere and really wants to improve things for Colombia's poor, it should increase CIDA's current funding for refugees, people who have been driven from their land and find themselves absolutely destitute in shanty towns all across Colombia.

[*English*]

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, for his courage in bringing forward our message of opposition, as New Democrats in the House and outside with Canadians from all sorts of organizations and directions, and that we stand for human rights and fair trade that looks at not just the well-being of Canadians but the well-being of those in the country with which we are trading.

What we are hearing here today is the extent to which the Colombian situation is so different from any other country, which is something that Canadians from coast to coast recognize. I have received numerous letters expressing opposition to this free trade agreement, as have so many others in the House.

**Mr. Ed Fast:** I did not get one. You are making it up.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** I am hearing all sorts of heckling. I am sensing a real feeling of defensiveness from both the Liberals and the Conservatives. I wonder if it is because they know they are on the wrong side of this debate. Is it because they know that by voting for this free trade agreement, they will be voting against human rights? That is what I would like to hear about.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Mr. Speaker, the member for Churchill, who is one of the bright new members of our Parliament, is absolutely right. We have a united NDP caucus fighting this and members of the Bloc are also fighting this. Thousands upon thousands of Canadians have written to the Leader of the Opposition to say that it is completely wrong-headed of him to endorse this agreement.



*Government Orders*

I understand the Liberals are now under a lot of pressure. I hope Canadians at large will keep the pressure on and keep those thousands of emails and letters coming in to Liberal members of Parliament and the Leader of the Opposition because the Liberals are wrong on this bill. Through public pressure, they can be forced to do what is right, which is to vote down this bill.

The Conservatives will be getting letters on this. Once it comes out in Conservative ridings that they are doing deals with regimes linked to drug trafficking and paramilitary, I do not think Conservative supporters will be too happy at all.

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I also want to thank my colleague for Burnaby—New Westminster for elevating the standard of debate over this particular free trade deal.

The one thing he points out that we should all be cognizant of is the whole myth associated with the globalization of capital, which was that globalization would somehow elevate the standards of labour and environmental conditions in the countries with which we trade, even though they are unwilling to ever put labour or environmental standards in those trade agreements.

In fact, the inverse has been true. The only way we will get countries like Colombia to elevate their standards of labour and human rights is by not allowing them to play in that sandbox of globalized capital trade, et cetera, unless they do come up to some minimum standards of decency.

I have a question for my colleague. I remember when Dick Martin, the head of ORIT, the labour organization associated with the Organization of American States, came back to Canada and sounded the alarm that they were killing trade unionists in the streets. The head of the teachers' union, the head of the nurses' union and the head of the miners' union were summarily executed in the driveways in front of their homes. Does my colleague remember the warning that Dick Martin sounded in this place a number of years ago?

• (1355)

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Mr. Speaker, I certainly do. We have had abundant evidence coming from previous years and from human rights organizations now. There is no doubt that Parliament should be voting thumbs down on this agreement. We certainly hope the Liberals will stop propping up the Conservatives on this. I think public pressure will succeed in changing the Liberals' minds.

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, free trade is something we support as a whole in general but this bill is not to be taken lightly. Some very serious questions need to be answered.

When I was the minister of the Canadian International Development Agency with trade agreements especially that we were working on at the time in the Central America areas, we always took into consideration the developmental aspect of the region. One of the things we do not want to do is end up with a free trade agreement that benefits us or the elite of Colombia but that it does the exact opposite of what our development program is trying to do.

In that case, I would want to know, because I have not as yet seen anything, whether in this case CIDA has had a say and whether the minister for CIDA has signed off on this trade agreement

arrangement and was part of the discussion and negotiations to see how this agreement impacts on the poor people of Colombia.

Ultimately, we would be totally remiss, to say the least, if we were to make agreements with Colombia, or any other country for that matter, where we are providing assistance and have an agreement that would be contrary to what our system is trying to do. Therefore, this is a very important issue.

We know that in the last several years, the Colombia government has made significant progress under President Uribe toward achieving security for the Colombian people. There have been significant reductions in violence and human rights abuses. The general murder rate has fallen dramatically and the International Crisis Group has noted that since 2003 Colombia has witnessed a substantial decline in violence and kidnappings. That sounds very positive.

I would like to ask the Minister of International Trade to let us have information as to what impact, if an impact assessment has been done, this agreement would have on the poverty levels in Colombia. That is a very critical and very important because the two must go hand in hand.

This is not a bill that one can take lightly. Some serious questions need to be asked as a result of what we are looking at.

Part of the Conservative government's plan is to focus on the Americas while abandoning Africa. It has decided to make our hemisphere or Central and South America a priority because it is best for our economic situation. I am not suggesting that we should not focus on the Americas. We need to focus on the Americas because they are part of our hemisphere. However, to do that and, at the same time, abandon Africa and any other commitments we have and to focus solely on what is in Canada's economic best interest when we do development is absolutely not acceptable.

I would like to see the assessment done by CIDA to see whether this agreement benefits Canada and perhaps the elite of Colombia but does not benefit the poor of Colombia. If that is the case, I would have some serious problems with this trade agreement and we would need to very clearly look at it.

I must say that I have serious problems with a government that premises its development on whether or not it benefits its economic security and benefits it economically. That is not the basis for development because that is tied to aid. The basis of development—

• (1400)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** I apologize but I must interrupt the member at this time. She will have 16 minutes remaining when the House returns to this matter.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS***[English]***HABITAT FOR HUMANITY**

**Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw to the attention of the House an upcoming project organized by the technology and experimental learning team at the District School Board of Niagara.

Students and teachers within my riding of Niagara West—Glanbrook and across the Niagara Peninsula have been involved in the seventh Habitat for Humanity project in the area, building homes for local deserving families.

From June 26 to July 7 of this year, 20 Niagara area students and teachers will be participating in a building project with Habitat for Humanity in El Salvador. This project will allow students to develop a better understanding of cultures, customs and traditions of the world while building on the skills gained from the continued work in Niagara.

I would invite all members of the House to join me in offering best wishes for the students and teachers of the Niagara District School Board for their project in El Salvador.

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**TORONTO ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL ACADEMY**

**Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I had the honour the other day of attending an event at the Metropolitan Centre in Scarborough commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Toronto Orthodox Theological Academy and also the graduating class of the year.

In congratulating the graduates, I also wish to pay tribute to His Eminence Metropolitan Archbishop Sotirios of Canada whose vision and foresight, complemented with his dedication, determination and commitment, has guided the steady growth of the Orthodox Church in Canada for 35 years.

I also had the honour of welcoming to Canada, on behalf of the Liberal Party of Canada, His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios of America who was not only impressed by the achievements of Greek Canadians and the immense growth of the church but most impressed with our country.

On behalf of all Greek Canadians, I wish to thank both eminences for their spiritual guidance. *Eis Pola eti Despota.*

\* \* \*

*[Translation]***XAVIER DOLAN**

**Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Xavier Dolan, a young Quebec filmmaker, swept three of the four prizes awarded during the Directors' Fortnight, a sidebar to the Cannes Film Festival.

Dolan wrote the script for his film, *J'ai tué ma mère*, at 17, then directed it at 19, starring in the film alongside Anne Dorval. His feature won the independent cinema programmers' Art Cinema Award, the Société des auteurs et compositeurs dramatiques prize for

best French-language film, and the Regards Jeunes prize, for a first or second feature film.

Flabbergasted, the young director said of his largely self-financed film, "Never in my life have I felt so proud and so happy to belong to our nation, the Quebec nation".

Now it is the Bloc Québécois' turn to tell him how proud we are of him and of the honour he has brought to Quebec at Cannes. We wish him a tremendously prolific career.

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*[English]***HIGH TECH INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, recently, we have seen major job losses at companies like Nortel. Not only are we losing valuable jobs but employees' rights are being ignored and hard-earned Canadian knowhow in the high tech industry is leaving our country. At the same time, we have seen massive bonuses paid out to Nortel executives.

When it comes to action, sadly, the government is on the sidelines. What we need is government action to guarantee the protection of pensions and severance packages for high tech workers, to tighten the rules for foreign takeovers of Canadian high tech companies so that taxpayers' investments in the industry are protected and to direct government stimulus investment in a way that reinvests the high tech sector in Canada.

We have an opportunity for our economy to improve so that when we come out of this recession we can be stronger, fairer and greener. To achieve that goal, we need smart investments in innovation.

The time for action is now. If the government will not lead and hold companies accountable, then Parliament and its committees should.

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**PHYSICAL FITNESS**

**Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to present a gift from all four corners of the House to everyone in the chamber.

Today, we launch a new, ambitious program that we hope will make each MP healthier and, in the process, make us better role models as parliamentarians. The program relies on two nationally renowned coaches who have volunteered to get MPs and senators walking, running, swimming or cycling.

As the MP whose riding includes most of the Olympic and Paralympic sites, I am delighted to introduce to the House an initiative which, in this Olympic year, we are calling "20:10".

*[Translation]*

Exercising for 20 minutes and 10 seconds twice a week contributes to better health.

• (1405)

[English]

All Canadians like to see members of the House working together in a common cause for the benefit of the whole country. This is why colleagues of all four parties have joined me in this initiative, and I thank them for their support.

Regardless of their level of fitness, I welcome all of my colleagues in this and the other chamber to join me on the trails and in the water of our glorious country.

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#### CANADA-U.S. BORDER

**Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in just one week, Canadians and Americans crossing one of our 22 shared land border crossings will be required for the first time to use a passport.

This final phase of the western hemisphere travel initiative does little to make our border more secure, but does threaten more than half a trillion dollars in trade annually and puts at risk more than two million Canadian jobs.

With little more than a quarter of Americans holding a passport, the spontaneous casual travel Canadian communities have counted on will be hit hard.

The Conservative government has reacted with silence. It has let years slip by, leaving it to states and provinces to scramble for a solution as it does nothing.

Even as top U.S. officials call for a real hard border, the Conservatives do nothing. As the U.S. Homeland Secretary calls for the Canadian border to be treated the same as the Mexican border, as various top U.S. officials claim that terrorists, even the 9/11 terrorists, come from Canada, the Conservatives have done nothing.

The government's inaction, its utter unwillingness to defend Canada's interests, risks thousands of Canadian jobs and billions in trade. Its failure and its refusal to stand up for our reputation and economic interests must be challenged.

\* \* \*

#### CHILDREN'S BRIDGE FOUNDATION

**Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, all around Parliament Hill lately, people have been buying and selling goats, yes, goats. It is all part of a fundraiser for the Children's Bridge Foundation in association with Embrace-an-Orphanage, which challenged parliamentarians to a goat selling contest.

Buying goats may seem humorous to us, but it is important to realize the role goats play in Ethiopian society. They are a source of healthy milk and cheese. They provide employment for herders and opportunities for families.

This Wednesday we gather to see which political party has accumulated the largest herd. I am pleased the talents of the government House leader have been put to good use heading the gathering of the Conservative herd of goats. The winning party will get to name the ceremonial goat for the following year.

#### Statements by Members

Regardless of what party wins, the true winners are the orphaned and abandoned children in the Nazareth Children's Center in Ethiopia. Last year the foundation raised \$100,000 for a nutrition and education program for 250 orphaned children. This year the fund will help 750 kids on the waiting list.

Let me thank all members for the difference they are making in the lives of children in difficult circumstances.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### BERNARD DEROME

**Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, last week, Quebec's National Assembly awarded its medal of honour to Bernard Derome, former news anchor for Radio-Canada television. Mr. Derome, who was at the helm of Radio-Canada's *Le Téléjournal* for nearly 40 years, spoke out against this government, and I quote:

"given how we are—and I'm weighing my words here—dismantling an institution that is recognized for being the watchdog of rigorous news and information, information I call intelligent, for among other reasons, ideological motives."

Mr. Derome continued, "Being informed is being free, as René Lévesque said." He went on to appeal to civil society to defend and support CBC/Radio-Canada. As one of his colleagues said, Mr. Derome, on the eve of his retirement, made a personal, heartfelt appeal for an organization that he cares so much about and to which he has dedicated 44 years of his life.

On behalf of all my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I would like to commend this great newsman and celebrate his career.

\* \* \*

[English]

#### SYLVIA ZEIFMAN

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the life and contribution of Sylvia Zeifman. Born in Toronto, Sylvia was raised by a single mother during the Great Depression. She attended Harbord Collegiate and then went on to teachers college.

She met her husband Meyer in Shomer HaDati, a religious youth group, and they married at age 20. They celebrated their 56th anniversary in December and have four children, 19 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren, with two more expected next month.

Sylvia was a treasurer of Emunah Women and president of Eitz Chaim Mothers Association. She was legendary for her warm and gracious demeanour and for her love and devotion to her family, to Canada, to the Jewish people and to the holy land of Israel.

Sylvia passed away on May 11. I invite the entire House to join with her family and celebrate the life of Sylvia Zeifman.

*Statements by Members*

•(1410)

[*Translation*]

**ARTS AND CULTURE**

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it will no doubt have escaped my Conservative colleagues, but the Canadian film industry has once again been honoured at the Cannes Film Festival.

A prodigy has been born. Despite his youth, Xavier Dolan wowed the juries and won three awards in the Directors' Fortnight.

His film, *J'ai tué ma mère*, also known as *I Killed my Mother*, once again drew the attention of connoisseurs from around the world to the relevance and quality of Canadian cinema. Distribution agreements are already in place for this film, which will mean even more international exposure for Canadian culture.

On behalf of all my colleagues, I want to congratulate Mr. Dolan on his achievement and assure him that we on this side of the House, at least, are very anxious to see his film.

In conclusion, I would also like to congratulate Louis-José Houde, who was honoured yesterday evening at the Gala des Oliviers. If I could talk as fast as he does, you would not have to interrupt me, Mr. Speaker.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

**MISSING CHILDREN**

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today I rise in the House on National Missing Children's Day in order to highlight the importance and success of our missing children program, a program that aims at preventing child abductions as well as returning missing children back to their families and loved ones.

There is no greater fear for a parent than to have a child go missing. Our government is working with its partners to keep our nation's children safe and protect them from harm. Our missing children program works tirelessly, both domestically and internationally, to find and return children to their families.

Since 1988, more than 8,000 children have been located or recovered because of the perseverance and diligent efforts of our missing children program.

Today we recognize the Zebra Child Protection Centre as this year's recipient of the Air Canada Kids' Horizons/RCMP Child Recovery Award. We also recognize the Peel police vice squad as this year's recipient of Our Missing Children Award of Excellence.

I encourage all Canadians to join me in thanking those people from all across Canada who have made it their life's work.

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**BIKE TO WORK WEEK**

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, thousands of Torontonians cycled to work this morning with their mayor to kick off Bike to Work Week. There are many more cyclists on the road since the leader of the New Democratic Party led the Toronto Cycling Committee 20 years ago.

Cycling is healthy, very economical and good for the environment. However, across the country, less than 2% of Canadians bike to work, as compared to the 86% who travel by car.

The federal government should take a leadership role to promote cycling by dedicating infrastructure funding investments to create bike lanes, paths and secure parking.

Transport infrastructure projects should incorporate the needs of cyclists in their design. Side guards on trucks should be installed to reduce cycling fatalities. Bike racks should be available on buses. Financial incentives should be offered to Canadians who buy new bikes. After all, 82% of Canadians support federal government spending to encourage safe cycling and a healthy lifestyle.

The time for the government to act is now.

\* \* \*

**MEMORIAL CUP TOURNAMENT**

**Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, four teams, three provinces and the best up and coming talent the Canadian Hockey League has to offer. I am talking about the Memorial Cup tournament.

Poet Robert Frost wrote about the road less travelled; well, Windsor's Spitfires took the road to the cup never travelled. Showing a toughness locked deep in the City of Windsor's DNA, the Spits became the only team in CHL history to lose the first two tournament games and come back to win the Memorial Cup, the first in the cup's 91 year history and the tournament's 37 year history.

It was a fitting end to a near record season that saw the end of the big red barn, the honouring of the late Mickey Renaud, and an OHL championship.

Hats off to the teams from Kelowna, Drummondville, and the host team Rimouski for determined, gritty play and sportsmanship.

Congratulations to Spits GM Warren Rychel, CHL coach of the year Bob Boughner, the people and the City of Windsor, and the hardest working hockey players in the CHL, the Memorial Cup champs, our Windsor Spitfires.

\* \* \*

•(1415)

[*Translation*]

**DEATH OF TWO GASPÉ FISHERMEN**

**Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, on May 18, a fishing boat overturned one kilometre from the coast after unloading its catch of crabs at Rivière-au-Renard, in Gaspé.

The *Marsouin 1* was carrying three fishermen at the time of the unfortunate accident. Firmin Fortin, 67, of Cap-aux-Os, and George-Henri English, 46, of Rosebridge, lost their lives. Captain Fortin was an experienced sailor.

The entire coastal community is in mourning. This incident is a reminder that although this most honourable occupation is not without excitement and adventure, it has its share of danger.

The members of the Bloc Québécois and I wish to extend our most sincere condolences to the families and friends of the victims as well as to the entire community.

We also salute the courage of Gaétan Bernard, the only crew member to survive this marine tragedy.

\* \* \*

[English]

#### ARTHUR ERICKSON

**Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that we mourn the passing of one of Canada's greatest architects, Arthur Erickson.

Mr. Erickson leaves a rich legacy behind. We need only think of Simon Fraser University to be reminded of his vision.

[Translation]

The talent and genius of Mr. Erickson did not go unnoticed. He was awarded the Gold Medal award by the American Institute of Architects in 1986.

[English]

Among his numerous awards, he was also made a companion of the Order of Canada in 1981.

Mr. Erickson also answered the call when his country asked him to design our embassy in Washington, D.C. His abilities in creating places of beauty with concrete and glass still leaves us in awe to this day.

Today we can still hold Mr. Erickson's career as an example for the thousands of creative young Canadians.

[Translation]

His distinguished career can be held up as an example for all young Canadians who dream of putting their creativity to work, even internationally.

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#### LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the global economic crisis is wreaking havoc around the world, but our country is doing relatively well thanks to its solid banking system and low taxes.

Our government is doing everything in its power to alleviate the impact of the crisis, which originated outside of our borders.

The opposition leader's ideas about taxation are completely backward. In his mind, Liberal leadership means higher taxes.

Since making controversial statements about not taking any options off the table, he has not given Canadians any answers. Which taxes does he plan to increase? Who will bear the brunt of the tax hike? The poor? People who are already having trouble making ends meet? Small business owners?

#### Oral Questions

Our government is determined to show the opposition leader's true colours. Quebeckers and Canadians do not truly know this man, a man of meaningless rhetoric, a man without a plan to help the Quebec nation.

[English]

**The Speaker:** On May 14, 2009, points of order were raised alleging the use of unparliamentary language by several hon. members.

I have reviewed the arguments made by the hon. members who raised these points, and I will return to the House tomorrow with a ruling on this matter.

[Translation]

I would like to thank the House and the hon. members for their patience.

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## ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

### INFRASTRUCTURE

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the country is facing record unemployment, record bankruptcies, record hardship for small businesses, especially auto dealers, and still the stimulus is not flowing. It is nearly June. Cities and municipalities are still waiting for the infrastructure funding that was promised in the budget. The government has already missed the June construction season.

Why has only six per cent of the stimulus gotten out of the door?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are working co-operatively with provinces and municipalities. We are getting the job done. That non-partisan work is really paying dividends.

I commend to the Leader of the Opposition the following quote: "It does not make sense to say we passed a budget in April and it is the first of May and we have to deal with the little bit of time to see whether these measures we supported in fact have worked".

Who said that? It was the leader of the Liberal Party himself.

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### EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, still there is no answer to the question of why only six per cent of the stimulus has gone out as of the 26th of May.

Improving EI eligibility will put money in the hands of 150,000 Canadians and their families, people hardest hit during this crisis. That is effective, immediate and targeted stimulus, and it will get there before the hon. member's infrastructure programs even begin to kick in.

The government can do this without raising payroll taxes and it can do it without raising benefit levels or duration, so why will the government not make EI work?

*Oral Questions*

● (1420)

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to doing absolutely everything we can to help Canadians who, through no fault of their own, find themselves unemployed. The Minister of Human Resources just this morning announced supports for more than 40,000 Canadians to be able to get the tools they need to get employment to provide for themselves and their families.

What the leader of the Liberal Party has to do is to come clean and admit that his only plan for the unemployed is to raise taxes, which would kill jobs, especially for small businesses. That is what Canadians do not want, a job-killing payroll tax increase, which is exactly what would be required under the Liberal plan.

[Translation]

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, what the minister just said is completely and absolutely false. Improving access to employment insurance and putting money in the hands of Canadians would stimulate the economy immediately. The Prime Minister can do that today, without raising taxes.

I repeat the question. Will the Prime Minister and this government, which is doing nothing at this time, improve access to employment insurance?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what is absolutely clear is what the Leader of the Opposition, the Liberal Party leader, said on April 14: "We will have to raise taxes". That is the Liberal plan for the economy, namely, to raise taxes for Canadians. That is the last thing our economy needs.

[English]

We have a strong economic action plan that will cut taxes, invest in infrastructure and get the job done.

What the Leader of the Opposition has to come clean on is which taxes he will raise and who will suffer the most under the Liberal tax-raising plan.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the budget was tabled almost 120 days ago. The Minister of Finance himself set the deadline for availability of stimulus funds. And yet, across the country, nothing is happening. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities says that the funds are not being disbursed and that the opportunities are diminishing.

How can the Prime Minister be satisfied with 120 days of Conservative failure?

[English]

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are working constructively with our municipal and provincial partners.

Just this morning, the Minister of Industry and various members of the government announced significant investments in post-

secondary education, three of them right here in the city of Ottawa, and from Brock University to Toronto and southwestern Ontario.

More infrastructure spending will have been completed this year than in any year in our history. It is moving 10 times faster than under any other Liberal government. The Liberal plan is only to dig deeper, to ask working families to pay more taxes. That will kill jobs, and that is why this government will never undertake that type of reckless plan.

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians know what that answer means: 120 days and zero jobs created.

What those days have delivered is an IMF report showing that the government is actually running a \$120 billion deficit, not the \$80 billion that it claims. This is confusing for Canadians. The Conservatives are promising money. They are not spending money, but the deficit is going through the roof. Will they confirm their promise to give us a new fiscal forecast before the summer?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what I can confirm is that this government, in every corner of the province, from coast to coast to coast, is investing in infrastructure. We did a significant amount in British Columbia. We have done a significant amount of investments in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and we are getting the job done here in the province of Ontario.

The member should come clean with Canadians and unveil the Liberal plan to raise taxes so we can have an honest debate. He knows, as does everyone else in this country, that high taxes kill jobs. The Liberal leader has committed to raising taxes and the economy cannot take it in this difficult time. The Liberals should come clean and be honest with Canadians. Who will pay more under their tax-grabbing plan to expand the nanny state?

\* \* \*

● (1425)

[Translation]

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said again recently that a 360-hour eligibility threshold for employment insurance is completely absurd because it would give the unemployed 52 weeks of EI benefits, which is the maximum. Nothing could be further from the truth. The maximum number of weeks of benefits an unemployed worker can receive with a 360-hour eligibility threshold is 36, taking into account the different variables that determine the benefit period.

Why is the Prime Minister spreading such falsehoods?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the opposition's role is to always try to get more and more without worrying about the costs to taxpayers.

*Oral Questions*

This year, we even decided to freeze the employment insurance contribution rate to avoid taxing Canadians more, because the country is going through an economic crisis. The Bloc Québécois had asked for two weeks. We provided an additional five weeks of EI benefits, which helps people by giving them more time to find a new job when it is most difficult to do so.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the question was very clear: how can the Conservatives talk about 52 weeks of benefits when they know that is not true? If I were wrong, they would not hesitate to tell me so. If the minister is not saying so, that means he knows that that is false.

This same minister also said that a 360-hour eligibility threshold would encourage people to work under the table.

Can he explain how giving more people access to employment insurance would encourage moonlighting? Would he not do better to attack something other than the unemployed? We are not asking the government to encourage moonlighting, but to give more people the right to employment insurance.

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our whole employment insurance system is based on how easy it is for someone to find a job in the region where he or she lives. Naturally, it is easier to find work in Quebec City, where the unemployment rate is 4.4%, than in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, where the rate is 9% or 10%, or in Gaspé, where it is even higher. That is the reality in our country. If you live in an area with a high unemployment rate, you have to work fewer hours to qualify for employment insurance.

Recently, the Bloc Québécois voted against a motion to add five weeks to the end of the benefit period so that people could receive benefits for a longer time.

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, reducing the eligibility threshold to 360 hours is not enough. The government must also eliminate the two-week waiting period. Five extra weeks of benefits is all well and good, but what workers who have just been laid off are really worried about is getting their benefits as soon as possible. One does not preclude the other, after all.

Does the government agree that it is just as important to eliminate the two-week waiting period in order to provide benefits as soon as workers become unemployed?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, allow me explain, once again, how it works. If a person entitled to 30 weeks of employment insurance were to begin collecting benefits two weeks earlier, those benefits would just run out two weeks earlier. The claimant would receive the same number of weeks. With our approach, that person will collect another five weeks of benefits on top of the original 30 weeks, at a time when it takes longer than usual to find a job. That sounds like a much better deal to me: five weeks instead of two. But the Bloc voted against that.

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, like the Liberals before them, the Conservatives are making it harder and harder for people to benefit from employment insurance.

What is stopping the government from adopting a good-faith approach, as it does with income taxes? Why the arrogant attitude? Why consider all unemployed workers to be potential fraudsters?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the House that, during these difficult economic times, we are investing \$12 billion in various infrastructure projects across the country. We have put such measures in place to support economic activity, as well as unemployed workers and workers who are having a hard time.

Today, we announced a \$500 million investment to help laid-off, long-tenured workers with many years of experience undertake professional development or retrain. From now on, individuals transitioning to a new field can collect employment insurance benefits for up to two years.

• (1430)

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, when workers and the unemployed heard that the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development was going to make an announcement about employment insurance, they hoped that the government had finally understood, had finally listened to reason. They hoped that the Conservatives would do what had to be done and improve access to employment insurance.

However, the government decided not to give any hope to those excluded from the existing system. Why?

[English]

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the New Democratic Party came out against our budget before it was even presented in the House of Commons. I suggest they were unlikely to change their minds either before or after the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development made the impressive announcement of more than \$500 million of additional supports that will provide help to more than 40,000 Canadians who are desperately seeking employment.

These are the types of tools that will give unemployed Canadians the hand up and provide them with the support they need. The Liberals and the NDP want to dig deeper into the pockets of hard-working Canadians, raise payroll taxes and kill jobs. That is a bad prescription for the economy of Canada.

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, there was nothing new here. The government simply re-announced money that had already been announced in the budget. Then, it cut every dollar that was to go to a worker for retraining down to 25 cents. That is what it did.

The fact is that the New Democratic Party has laid out a plan that has been endorsed and adopted by the House. It lays out what should happen: reduce the number of hours needed to qualify; expand the eligibility rules; eliminate the two-week penalty that is imposed and increase the benefits.

The House adopted the changes. Canadians want to see the changes happen. Why did the government not get it done?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, one big change we have seen in this session of Parliament is that the NDP and the leader of the NDP are now writing economic policy for the Liberal Party. That is a real shame. It is exactly what we saw in the coalition.

This government came forward with a plan to provide 40,000 more Canadians with the help and support they need. The NDP and the Liberal leader are suggesting that if a person works for 45 days, he or she can be eligible for unemployment insurance for upwards of a year.

That would result in massive increases in taxes. It would hurt an economy that is struggling. Those of us on this side of the House will not buy into that socialist scheme to raise taxes that is purported by the leader of the Liberal Party.

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, first they attacked workers and next it is going to be seniors. What we face today is a crisis in our pension plans. People need to know that there is going to be some security, protection and enhancement of their pensions. They are concerned about what has happened during the economic crisis, as they see their savings frittered and whittled away by what has gone on in the markets.

Today, provinces, labour leaders and others are calling for a pension summit. The question is whether the government will get serious about taking leadership on the pension issue and begin to take steps towards a summit, a national strategy or a policy, or is it just going to leave seniors to—

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is this government, not the NDP, that has brought forward a range of services and support to help seniors. It is this government that brought forward specific tax cuts to specifically support seniors and increases and changes to the guaranteed income supplement to help those seniors who are most vulnerable. It is no surprise that all this party wants to do is raise taxes one day and then have summits the next.

I can say that this side of the House is committed to an economic action plan that will give more jobs, more hope and less taxes to Canadians, unlike the Liberal leader and his friend in the NDP.

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the only things in the House that are shovel-ready are the answers from that minister.

When I heard the minister was making an EI change this morning, I hoped she had seen the light and had maybe decided to stop the distortions and the untruths and offer something to help the many thousands of Canadians who are victims of this Conservative recession, but no, not even close. It was a rehash a previously announced plans, once again.

Did the Conservatives standardize benefits? No. Did they bring regional fairness to EI, a national 360-hour standard? No.

• (1435)

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I do not know what the hon.

member is shovelling, but let me read his remark with respect to the job skills upgrading and training we are doing and the dollars we are investing, the \$500,000. Here is what he said in an interview today, “The Liberals very much support training, particularly retraining for laid-off workers. We think it is very, very important”. I do not know what the member is shovelling, but he should get behind this program and support it.

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government continues to mislead Canadians about EI. It knows it is misleading them and dividing people. It is deliberate and it does not care.

It insults victims of this Conservative recession by suggesting that people want to be unemployed. It does not want to make it “too easy” to get EI. Does the government not understand that no Canadian wants to lose a job? They do not want their friends or neighbours to lose their jobs either. What Canadians want is the Prime Minister to lose his job.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member is trying to do is to play politics on the backs of the most vulnerable Canadians who are going through a difficult time.

This is what the member for Acadie—Bathurst said, “The Liberals are trying to score political points on EI that they have cut themselves”.

If the Liberals are going to add benefits to this program, how are they going to do it? By raising taxes, like the leader of the Liberal opposition said, or are they going to raise job-killing taxes by imposing EI premiums?

Here is what the member for Kings—Hants said, “Payroll taxes and EI taxes in particular prevent businesses from hiring people. Payroll taxes, especially EI taxes are—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Halifax West.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**MEDICAL ISOTOPES**

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last week, the government announced that all activities at the Chalk River laboratories will stop for an indefinite period. The government does not know if it will be two months, eight months, or something else.

For the 5,000 Canadians awaiting diagnosis every day in Canada, this is a “catastrophe”, as one expert, Dr. François Lamoureux, said yesterday.



*Oral Questions*

What will this government do to assure Canadians that this will be the last isotope crisis?

[*English*]

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his concern on the issue. Indeed, it is serious.

AECL informed us last week that it would not be restarting the national research universal reactor. As a result, we do have a shortage in medical isotopes at the moment.

The government is working in two ways.

First, we are seeking to ensure global supply. This is a global issue. We are working with our counterparts in four other countries in order to increase global supply.

Second, we are working to manage the shortage that we currently have. The Minister of Health is reaching out to the provinces and the territories. She is speaking with them about triage, prioritization and alternate methods.

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canada last failed to supply the world with medical isotopes 18 months ago. The Prime Minister's response was to scapegoat Canada's nuclear safety regulator.

Now we have the Prime Minister's hand-picked new minister, new executive at AECL, new nuclear safety regulator and over \$300 million invested in Chalk River. The end result is things are worse, an indefinite shutdown, 5,000 Canadians put at risk every day.

What is the government doing to ensure this never happens again?

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in December we released a statement indicating our five point plan to deal with contingencies in case of an unexpected medical isotope shortage. We have put those five steps into play, and I highlighted those previously.

As well, I think it is important to point out that in 13 years five Liberal cabinet ministers had been privy to the information regarding this reactor and the five cabinet ministers did nothing.

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[*Translation*]

**FORESTRY INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance admitted that the manufacturing sector will never recover the force it once had in its heyday, and that it will make up a smaller portion of our economy for the next few years. If nothing more is done, the same fate awaits the forestry sector.

Instead of giving up on the future of the forestry industry, why will the minister not do everything he can to save and defend this industry, as he did for the auto sector?

● (1440)

[*English*]

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I did not catch the question because the translation was not coming through.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am simply asking why the Minister of Finance is doing nothing for Quebec's forestry industry. The government thinks it will help silviculture by injecting only \$100 million over two years. That is absolutely false. Guy Chevette of the Quebec Forest Industry Council warns that the industry is heading toward bankruptcy.

How can the government do this? What is it waiting for to wake up and grant loan guarantees, as called for by the entire forestry industry?

**Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his questions, but once again, there are also many falsehoods in what he just said.

Not long ago, my colleague, the Minister of Natural Resources, and I had the pleasure of meeting with all the Canadian forestry industry presidents, who confirmed their very strong desire to maintain the softwood lumber agreement, which allowed for some stability when the global economic crisis and the market crisis were not such an issue.

We recently announced that Export Development Canada had supported the forestry industry through financial services to Quebec worth over \$9 billion last year. Therefore, it is false to say we are not doing anything.

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**AFGHANISTAN**

**Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, after the Minister of National Defence stated last week that the Canadian mission in Afghanistan might be extended beyond 2011, Afghan sources indicated that President Obama would require NATO members, including Canada, to provide more ground resources.

Will the government again say no to President Obama and remind him that this House has decided that the Canadian mission in Afghanistan will end in 2011?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there has been no change in the Canadian government's position. Its position is unchanged and reflects the will of the members of the House of Commons expressed in a motion that was passed, establishing six priorities and the end to our combat mission in 2011.

**Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government, with the support of the Liberals, voted to end the current mission in July 2011. That is the truth.

*Oral Questions*

Therefore, is the government committed to withdrawing Canadian soldiers from all combat zones at that time? Yes or no?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada shall respect the will expressed by the majority of MPs in this House.

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**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the situation in Pakistan is too important for the government to waffle on arms issues, especially when we know this will have consequences for the lives of our own soldiers in Afghanistan and in the whole area, including India.

I have a simple question for the Minister of National Defence. Does the Conservative government plan to lift the ban on arms sales to Pakistan, yes or no?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada is determined to support the Government of Afghanistan in building a strong, democratic society and nation.

Moreover, my colleague, the Minister of National Defence, was recently in Pakistan in connection with the military training assistance program, which provides training for senior officers in the Pakistani army.

Clearly, a stable and secure Pakistan, especially in the long term, is important to the stability of this region.

[*English*]

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Let me try in English, Mr. Speaker. The defence minister stated last week that Pakistan was the most dangerous country in the world. During his trip to Islamabad, he also said that the Conservative government was now contemplating lifting the ban on arms sales to Pakistan. His foreign affairs colleague quashes him by asserting that there is no plan to allow military exports to resume. Why did the defence minister make that comment then?

• (1445)

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my friend from the opposition always sees problems and there is no problem here. My colleague, the Minister of National Defence, was there to admit Pakistan as a member of the military training assistance program, which will allow Pakistan's senior army officers access to Canadian military training courses.

A secure and safe Pakistan is important for the long-term regional stability and we will continue to pursue that objective.

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**SRI LANKA**

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last week the United Nations secretary general visited Sri Lanka and visited the largest camp in the country. The camps now contain somewhere between 250,000 and 300,000 Tamils.

It would appear now that the government of Sri Lanka has taken a decision to exclude any international observation of what is taking place in those camps. Could the minister tell us what Canada's plan is to deal with that truly disgraceful situation?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am sure it is welcome news for all of our colleagues in the House that there is an end to hostilities in Sri Lanka, which has endured over two decades. I have spoken with the American secretary of state. We have called on the government of Sri Lanka to give the United Nations and other international humanitarian agencies immediate access to affected populations. Equally we call upon the government of Sri Lanka to move forward immediately with the president's promise to launch a political process that is inclusive of all communities in Sri Lanka.

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is precisely because it would appear that the president of Sri Lanka has rejected those appeals and those calls that I am asking the minister what Canada is going to do now.

**Mr. Laurie Hawn:** Let's invade.

**Hon. Bob Rae:** We have to deal with a serious situation that is affecting the very lives of close to 300,000 people. There may be some members on the other side who want to make partisan comments, but I am not one of those who will return.

I simply want to ask the minister this. What plan does Canada have to lead the rest of the world in an effort to ensure that there is in fact international observation and there are efforts to find a political solution?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister knows very well from the beginning of this—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon:** The hon. former prime minister knows full well—

**An hon. member:** Try premier.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has the floor. We will need to have some order so his response can be heard.

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon:** The former premier of Ontario, there we go.

Putting that aside, Mr. Speaker, we know full well that this government has been working in lockstep with our allies and like-minded countries to ensure that, first, we bring an end to the violence taking place, but at the same time that we are able to act and help those people who have been displaced.

My colleague, the Minister of International Cooperation, has been extremely active on that file. She has gone there. The people know that. She knows that we are working closely with the government of Sri Lanka to—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

## AFGHANISTAN

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence has just returned from Afghanistan where he visited our mission in Kandahar province. Could he give us a first-hand report on how the mission is going and what progress he saw?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I did have the real privilege to see the work that is being done in Afghanistan by our military, our officials from CIDA and the Department of Foreign Affairs and the tremendous contribution and commitment that is being demonstrated by Canadians. I was briefed on a successful operation by the Afghan National Army in co-operation with Canadian troops. It showcased their steady progress in defending the country under the positive Canadian mentoring happening there.

I also visited the HMCS *Winnipeg* and its crew, which are actively fighting piracy off the coast of Africa.

Whether it is our navy in the gulf, our army or air force fighting terrorism in Afghanistan, Canadians have one team of which they can be proud, the courageous, committed Canadian Forces.

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•(1450)

## MEDICAL ISOTOPES

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, 18 months ago, the government was faced with a 20-day shutdown of isotope production and said that we had to put aside nuclear safety in the interest of patient safety.

Now, faced with a shutdown that will last at least a month, maybe many months, the government is saying “ration” the isotopes.

How do we ration cancer treatment and cancer detection? Why has the government done nothing for 18 months to prevent this? Where is the plan today to ensure that patients have access to the medical imaging they need and deserve?

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in December 2008, the government set out a five point plan in a statement to deal with contingencies associated with a shortage of medical isotopes. We followed up on all of those and, in fact, have put all those into place.

In terms of the use of the medical isotopes, I will answer the question of the member for Winnipeg North with a quote from Dr. Thomas Perry, a past B.C. NDP provincial cabinet minister and a professor at the University of British Columbia. who said, “I’ve been struggling to think of a nuclear medicine procedure that cannot be achieved by another medium, another technique”.

There are other ways to deal with it and we are—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Sudbury.

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## CREDIT CARDS

**Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the half measures announced by the government will do nothing to stop

## Oral Questions

Canadians from being fleeced by credit card companies. There is nothing to limit interest rates and nothing to stop the outrageous fees.

Last month the House passed the New Democrats plan to stop credit card gouging, including limiting interest rates and stopping abusive fees. Increasing the font size on credit card contracts does not help Canadian families hurting right now.

Why will the government not actually do what is right and protect Canadians?

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of Finance for bringing forward the regulations that have been applauded by the Consumers' Association of Canada.

The Consumers' Association of Canada said, “All of the things that the finance minister has done are actually just what we asked for overall. I've got to congratulate him”.

We have the critics who want big government and we have the banks on the other side that want big corporations. When the Consumers' Association says that we are on the right path, I think we have struck the right balance.

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[Translation]

## INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

**Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, last Wednesday the National Assembly of Quebec unanimously adopted a motion calling for ownership of four parcels of land that it currently leases from the Canadian government. This request has fallen on deaf ears on two previous occasions. No nation can accept that the land on which its parliament sits belongs to another nation.

Will this government, which claims to recognize the Quebec nation, finally understand that this request is more than legitimate and that it must stop dragging its feet in a matter that has gone on too long?

**Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, when I met in February with my Quebec counterpart, Jacques Dupuis, we agreed to first focus on the economy and discuss this matter at a later date.

I have taken note of the Quebec National Assembly's unanimous motion and I am prepared to discuss this with my Quebec counterpart.

**Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Mr. Dupuis rightly pointed out that he did not understand why the matter had not been resolved, given that it would be easy to do so and that the request was legitimate.

Can the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and minister responsible for the Quebec City region explain what is so complicated about saying yes and going ahead immediately with the transfer of this land?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Mr. Dupuis also said he was surprised that this Parti Québécois proposal was raised at the National Assembly of Quebec in the midst of an economic crisis.

Having said that, I will negotiate with Quebec's elected government and not with the Bloc Québécois.

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• (1455)

[English]

**AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government's incompetence when it comes to the auto sector crisis is not just hurting communities with auto plants. It is having a direct impact on all of our communities starting with the announced closure of 240 GM dealerships across the country.

The Conservatives have done nothing to help consumers get credit to buy cars and now we hear that they demanded the closure of these GM dealerships as a condition for any financial support.

Why would the Conservative government rather push thousands of workers on to EI, if they can even qualify, instead of providing direct support for auto dealerships?

**Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question is not grounded in reality.

At a recent auto subcommittee meeting we heard many great quotes. Stephen Beatty, the managing director of Toyota Canada, said:

—there's no other country I'd rather be in. The Canadian automotive marketplace last year grew, so it is unlike every other industrialized nation. There has been some fundamental health in the Canadian economy. And that's been the result of hard work by government and by industry....

[Translation]

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government imposed restructuring conditions on General Motors that resulted in the closure of 240 dealerships in Canada. Those closures will cause the loss of between 10,000 and 20,000 jobs in this country, but the Conservatives could not care less about workers.

Did the Conservatives also force GM to disregard the performance of the dealerships it decided to close and to get rid of francophone dealerships, which GM seems to be doing in the urban parts of the national capital region and in Quebec?

[English]

**Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, members of the Liberal Party constantly talk about the steps that we have taken in the auto sector. They know full well that our government has taken a major leadership role in that sector and yet they keep asking the same types of questions. Maybe I can shed some light on that by reading a quote from their leader who said:

Politics is theatre. It is part of the job to pretend to have emotions that you do not actually feel.

The Leader of the Opposition wrote that in a *New York Times* op ad.

While the Liberals pretend to care, this government is taking action in the best interests of all Canadian workers.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, according to *Le Devoir*, the Old Port of Montréal Corporation is just as incompetent as the rest of the Conservative government when it comes to moving infrastructure projects forward. Despite support from the municipality, the environmental sector and the business sector, an innovative, privately funded transportation project has been blocked because the Old Port of Montréal Corporation is refusing even to evaluate it.

Will the minister responsible for economic development in Montreal tell us what is going on with this file?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to emphasize how hard the Old Port of Montréal Corporation is working.

I should tell the member that I will be meeting with the chair of the corporation's board of directors in 20 minutes.

**Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we are talking about a \$100 million project that is being held up in the middle of an economic crisis. We are not asking the government to support it; we just want it to be evaluated. We do not want the government to go beyond its jurisdiction; we just want it to give the Old Port of Montréal Corporation a wake-up call.

Is the minister telling us that he and his friend from Montreal are about to become the worst nightmares that economic development in Montreal has ever known?

[English]

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** As I said, Mr. Speaker, I will be meeting in 20 minutes with the head of the Port of Montreal. Officials with the port put forward a stimulus program grant that would not have gone forward if it had been up to that member because he voted against the budget. He said that he did not want any money to go to Quebec or to Montreal. Thank goodness we have a strong minister responsible for Montreal who is ensuring that the job is getting done.

We will ensure that every effort is made to support projects in Montreal. What we will not do is raise taxes, which is what that member and the leader of the Liberal Party would have us do.

\* \* \*

**THE ECONOMY**

**Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in tough economic times, real leadership in managing the economy and taxpayer dollars is vital to ensure Canada leads the global economic recovery.

*Oral Questions*

Our Conservative government has an economic action plan that cuts taxes, invests in infrastructure and helps those hardest hit by extending EI benefits.

Could the President of the Treasury Board remind the House why our Conservative government is the only one that Canadians can trust to soundly manage the economy?

• (1500)

**Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government has proven to Canadians that we are the only option to soundly manage the economy. Our economic action plan is a road map to ensure that we continue to be a global leader in this recovery period. Our policies have reduced the tax burden on families, created jobs and are helping Canadians who have been hardest hit by the global recession.

Meanwhile, the leader of the Liberal Party says, “We will have to raise taxes”. That is not the direction our country should be going in.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about Skylink again, a company that has come up with an innovative project to link Montreal's Old Port with the South Shore by gondola. On the face of it, this project appears very promising, both in terms of attracting tourists and transporting people.

Why is the Conservative-run Old Port of Montreal Corporation refusing to consider the project? Why is the minister responsible for Montreal not asking what is happening with the federally run corporation? How could one government official decide on her own, without any analysis, to block a \$100 million project that has received so much support?

[English]

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting to watch another example of the Liberal Party following the NDP. That question was just asked by the NDP member for Outremont.

We will be meeting with the old Port of Montreal shortly after question period. Its officials have an exciting proposal with respect to infrastructure spending and it has the very active consideration of the government. I am meeting with them in 20 minutes and I am looking forward to learning more about it.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**MEDICAL ISOTOPES**

**Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it appears as though this government did not learn anything from the global shortage of medical isotopes caused by the sudden closure of the Chalk River facility in December 2007. A year and a half later, the entire world is going through the same crisis. Every day, thousands of patients will be deprived of an essential diagnostic tool.

What did the government do following the 2007 incident to ensure that the sudden, yet completely predictable, stoppage of the Chalk

River reactor would never again destabilize health care systems around the world?

[English]

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, this is a global issue. There are five reactors in the world that supply medical isotopes of this sort.

As we are one of the largest suppliers of medical isotopes in the world, we have been meeting with our global partners on the issue in order to search out ways to increase the supply of isotopes to the world in general. In fact, through our interventions, South Africa has increased its medical isotopes to North America and will be helping in terms of the global shortage.

\* \* \*

**ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, 10 years ago, the Government of Canada was building 50 first nations schools a year. Last year, under the present minister, that number dropped to one. No wonder the children of Attawapaskat were told they were no longer a priority.

The report of the Parliamentary Budget Officer shows massive underfunding, moneys being siphoned out of school building budgets and that there is no justifiable list from INAC to explain why some projects are going ahead and other projects are being cancelled.

Will the minister accept the recommendations of the report and work with us to set up a transparent process so we can see where the adequate resources are going?

**Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there is a process to determine infrastructure investment priorities and it is done in every province across the country. When we announced budget 2009, where we added \$200 million in extra dollars for school construction, I just took the list that was done at arm's length for me and we funded the 13 school projects that were covered in that.

However, that member voted against that. He did not want that \$200 million. What is more, he has never had a plan, as we saw with the Liberal-NDP coalition. As he said to the people of Attawapaskat, “I cannot promise I will ever build the school. We will just give it our best shot”.

**Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, tonight there will be an important vote on matrimonial real property rights, Bill C-8. The bill would correct the clear inequality that exists for those living on reserves by granting them basic rights and protections in the event of a relationship breakdown. All other Canadians currently enjoy this right but the Liberals are trying to defeat this bill with a hoist motion before the House.

Could the Minister of Indian Affairs tell this House why it is important that all parties support the bill?

*Routine Proceedings*

● (1505)

**Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is outrageous. Most Canadians probably do not even know that the basic rights and protections that other Canadians enjoy do not exist on reserves. No doubt that is why the NDP critic says that it is important that we do not play politics with this and we get this to committee, and why the Bloc Québécois said that by presenting an amendment to delay the bill, the Liberals know full well that the bill will die on the order paper.

I am absolutely certain that is not what aboriginal women want. What aboriginal women want and what they deserve is the same protections that every other Canadian woman enjoys in this country. The Liberals should be ashamed for hoisting this bill at tonight's vote.

\* \* \*

**PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

**The Speaker:** I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Daryl Hickie, Minister of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing for Saskatchewan.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

\* \* \*

**POINTS OF ORDER**

## ORAL QUESTIONS

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. During question period, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities was spreading some untruths about the Liberal EI plan for fairness, saying that people could qualify for EI after working 45 days and collect for a year. The minister knows this is not the case. EI benefits last anywhere from 19 to 50 weeks. Most would qualify at the early stage of that. We have heard this from the Prime Minister and the Minister of Human Resources. I would ask them to retract.

I do not think Canadians are foolish enough to be fooled by that, but for the benefit of the backbenchers on the Conservative side, I would like to clarify the record.

**The Speaker:** It does not sound like a point of order to me. It sounds more like a matter of debate. Members make statements that other members disagree with from time to time in the House and the Chair does not get involved in that kind of argument.

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**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[English]

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS**

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 14 petitions.

**MADE IN CANADA ACT**

**Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-392, An Act respecting the use of government procurements and transfers to promote economic development.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Windsor West for his support.

My made in Canada bill would require the government to purchase products or acquire services from Canadian companies or individuals. The workers I know at Ford Talbotville would love to build cars for the government fleet.

I am very proud to introduce this bill. It would create new markets for Canadian suppliers, strengthen sustainability and help us meet our environmental commitments and encourage Canadian entrepreneurship.

Daily announcements of closures and layoffs from across the country have played havoc with workers, families and communities. The Canadian government needs to take action to protect Canadian jobs.

New Democrats believe that Canadian communities should benefit from federal procurement. The current piecemeal approach should be replaced by a clear, transparent buy Canadian policy. Conservatives have been unwilling to defend Canadian workers and industry and this legislation would help to reverse that.

I am calling on my colleagues in the House of Commons to support this bill and give the Canadian economy and Canadian families the boost that they need.

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

\* \* \*

● (1510)

**PATENT ACT**

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-393, An Act to amend the Patent Act (drugs for international humanitarian purposes) and to make a consequential amendment to another Act.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured to introduce this bill in the House today. It would amend the Patent Act as a remedy to the serious flaws within Canada's access to medicines regime that was passed in this place unanimously in May 2004.

That initiative was intended to be a meaningful humanitarian tool to flow lifesaving medicines to the world's poorest nations at affordable below patent prices. The built-in problems have resulted not in a flow but a trickle and there has been only one successful application. Meanwhile, many people, thousands of men, women and children, suffer needlessly without getting access to the treatments that are available.

This bill is here with the help of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and with the support of Canadian Grandmothers for Africa, Grands 'n' More Winnipeg, the Stephen Lewis Foundation, Doctors Without Borders, Results Canada, and many other organizations.

I recommend this bill because it offers members amendments to the act that would streamline the process and get urgently needed drugs to HIV and AIDS patients as soon as possible.

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

\* \* \*

### PETITIONS

#### PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS' COMPENSATION FUND

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I want to present a new petition that came about from a visit to Parliament Hill by firefighters from across the country.

The petitioners state that police officers and firefighters are required to place their lives at risk in the execution of their duties on a daily basis. They also state that the employment benefits of police officers and firefighters often do not provide sufficient compensation for the families of those who are killed in the line of duty. They also state that the public mourns when a public safety officer loses his or her life in the line of duty and that the public wishes to support in a tangible way the surviving families at their time of need.

The petitioners therefore call upon Parliament to establish a fund known as the public safety officers' compensation fund for the benefit of families of police officers, firefighters and other public safety officers killed in the line of duty.

#### LIBRARY MATERIALS

**Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present two petitions from British Columbia and Alberta. Many petitions are coming in from all across Canada supporting Bill C-322, An Act to amend the Canada Post Corporation Act (library materials), which would protect and support the library book rate and extend it to include audio-visual materials.

#### SRI LANKA

**Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present on behalf of the Tamil Canadian community in my riding. The petitioners are calling upon the Government of Canada to pressure the government of Sri Lanka not to deny the Tamil population food, shelter, medicine and other fundamental necessities, to allow the UN and other international relief agencies access to the areas affected by the conflict, to stop shelling and bombing civilian habitats, hospitals, schools and places of worship, to take active and concrete measures by providing leadership to convince the international community and agencies to allow an international UN observer panel to monitor human rights violations and bring the perpetrators to justice, as recommended by the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights and the Governor General of Canada.

#### CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present pages and pages of petitions that Canadians have signed from across the country, from Vancouver

### Routine Proceedings

Island, British Columbia, the Prairies, Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada. All of the petitioners add their names to the tens of thousands of Canadians who have written to Parliament to say no to the Canada-Colombia free trade deal.

The petitioners say that the Government of Canada should halt the process until there is an independent and impartial human rights assessment done. As we well know, there are serious concerns around the ties of the Uribe regime with murderous paramilitary thugs and drug lords.

For all those reasons, many Canadians are adding their voices to others to say no to the Canada-Colombia free trade deal.

• (1515)

[Translation]

#### DARFUR

**Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise under Standing Order 36 to present a petition signed by many people in my riding and the surrounding area. The petitioners are calling for a commitment from the Canadian government and the international community to do whatever may be necessary to put an end to the atrocities that are still going on in Darfur.

[English]

#### UNSOLICITED AD MAIL AND FLYERS

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by many residents in my riding of Winnipeg Centre. They call upon the House to recognize that each year Canadian households receive 1,300 pieces of unsolicited mail. These signators comment that it is not only using up far too many trees but much of that paper is not recycled. We could switch to hemp as a source that is far less environmentally damaging.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to request the Minister of the Environment to consider bringing forward legislation requiring all unsolicited ad mail and flyers to be produced using easily recyclable paper, to phase in by year 2012 the use of hemp paper to be used in the production of flyers, and that all distributors of flyers obey all no flyer signs in Canada.

#### ANIMAL WELFARE

**Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present pursuant to Standing Order 36. One of them is from Canadians concerned about the regulations around the transport of animals.

The petitioners are calling for the Canadian Health of Animals Act to be brought up to date and revised to reflect international findings that call for a reduction in transport time and adequate enforcement regulations in the interests of animal welfare and the health and safety of Canadian food products.

*Routine Proceedings*

Canadians recognize that there is a responsibility not only to treat our animals humanely but also to understand that there is a direct link to the security of our own food supply when we concern ourselves with animal welfare.

SRI LANKA

**Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I present a petition from a number of constituents from my riding and across the country who are very much concerned about the humanitarian crisis and loss of countless lives in Sri Lanka. The petitioners call on the government to urge the Sri Lankan government in any way possible to allow for the free flow of food and medicine and the provision of shelter and other fundamentals to the citizens in need.

The world is watching as this crisis continues. Canadians want the violence to come to an end and the government to do its part to make sure that humanitarian assistance is provided to these people.

CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have many petitions from people who want to draw the attention of the House of Commons to the violence against workers and members of civil society by paramilitaries in Colombia, who are closely associated with the current government in Colombia. The violence has been ongoing. More than 2,200 trade unionists have been murdered since 1991. As well, acts of violence have been committed against indigenous people, Afro Colombians, human rights activists, workers, farmers, labour leaders and journalists.

Under the NAFTA-style agreement, Canada's and Colombia's ability to adopt sustainable economic, social, cultural and environmental public policies such as health care and public education were diminished. The labour side agreements under NAFTA have not been effective in protecting and improving labour standards, as has been the case in Mexico. Over one million agricultural jobs have been lost in Mexico since NAFTA was signed.

These petitioners are calling on Parliament to reject the Canada-Colombia trade deal until an independent human rights impact assessment is carried out and that the agreement be renegotiated along the principles of fair trade, which would take the environmental and social impacts fully into account while genuinely respecting labour rights and the rights of all affected parties.

\* \* \*

**QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER**

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 114 and 117.

[Text]

Question No. 114—**Mr. Glen Pearson:**

With respect to the money provided by the government in 2008 to the International Organization on Migration (IOM) for assistance to Darfur refugees in the Aweil State in Sudan: (a) did the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) or any other government department or agency contribute funds to help the Darfur refugees and, if so, what was the exact dollar amount contributed and on what date or dates, and to whom were these funds contributed; (b) was a budget proposed or requested by any government agency, department, non-governmental organization or international organization relating to these particular relief funds; (c) what information was provided to CIDA, and by whom, from which the government's

contribution amount was assessed for this particular crisis; (d) did the government provide any on-ground support or monitoring of relief work for this particular circumstance and, if so, in what capacity, and for how long; (e) have CIDA officials or any other government agency or department requested updates on the Darfur refugees and, if so, were any provided and by whom and what has been done with that information; and (f) what current measures is the government providing to ensure continued monitoring of mass migration and relief aid for refugees migrating into other ill-equipped areas of Southern Sudan?

**Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in regard to a) CIDA's bilateral Sudan program signed a contribution arrangement with the International Organization on Migration, IOM, to support the following project: "Basic Infrastructure and Livelihood Support to Highly Impacted Communities of Return in Northern Bahr el Ghazal State, South Sudan." The exact dollar amount contributed is \$3 million. The contribution arrangement was signed on March 28, 2008 and will remain in effect for the period of 18 months. These funds were contributed to the IOM in Washington, D.C.

In regard to b) Yes. A detailed budget and proposal pertaining to the aforementioned project was forwarded to CIDA by IOM.

In regard to c) Following a fact-finding mission by CIDA in July 2007, which included a visit with IOM in South Sudan, a proposal was submitted by IOM to CIDA's Sudan program pertaining to the aforementioned project, on August 20, 2007.

In regard to d) Yes. In June 2008, as a guest of IOM in Northern Bahr el Ghazal (Aweil County), a CIDA officer visited the site of the aforementioned project, during its inception phase, to assess the situation, determine the needs and see first-hand the types of interventions that CIDA would be supporting in the area. A follow-up visit was made to the same project in April 2009, to visibly assess the progress of the project. Each visit lasted approximately 3 days. In addition, also in April 2009, a CIDA official met with senior IOM staffers in both Khartoum and Juba.

In regard to e) As per the requirements of the contribution arrangement, IOM has provided progress and financial reports to CIDA with regard to the aforementioned project. This information is used by CIDA to follow the progress of the project against the initial plans and proposal. To date, the project has achieved promising results related to the following interventions: borehole rehabilitation and hand dug well construction; latrine construction; hygiene education; school construction; livelihood vocational training.

In regard to f) CIDA is continuously monitoring both the humanitarian and early recovery situation in Sudan via its Head of Aid in Khartoum, as well as through reports and regular communications with key stakeholders, including past and present recipients of CIDA funds. These field-based partners include, amongst others, various NGOs, UN agencies and other donors. In addition, CIDA HQ-based officers make regular field visits to Sudan to assess the situation, determine changing needs on the ground and to review progress against ongoing CIDA-funded projects.



*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 117—Ms. Irene Mathysen:**

With respect to Measurement Canada, what changes have been or will be made to the agency from January 2006 to January 2010, including: (a) changes to services that the agency provides; (b) changes to who is accredited to test and inspect devices; and (c) who pays the salaries of those accredited to test and inspect devices?

**Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in regard to a) Between January 2006 and January 2010, there have not been any changes to the services Measurement Canada provides and there are none planned. The agency will continue to administer the Weights and Measures Act and Electricity and Gas Inspection Act and deliver the services required by the statutes. These services include evaluating and approving prototype measuring devices, e.g., scales, gas pumps, electricity and natural gas meters, for use in Canada; testing and certifying the accuracy of measuring devices, investigating consumer and business complaints of alleged inaccurate measurement, granting private sector organizations the authority to test and certify measuring devices on the agency's behalf and ongoing audit/oversight of these authorized service providers to ensure compliance with program criteria and retention of required competencies, and calibrating and certifying the accuracy of physical measurement standards, e.g., weights, volume standards, test consoles, used to determine the accuracy of measuring devices.

In regard to b) Measurement Canada has two voluntary programs for the purpose of authorizing private sector service providers to test and inspect devices, the accreditation program and the registration program. Neither of these two programs has undergone significant changes since 2006 and there are no planned changes to program requirements in 2009.

The availability of these two programs improves device-owner access to inspection services by giving authorized service providers the flexibility to adopt the business model that best suits their needs and client base. There are presently 58 organizations accredited to inspect scales, gas pumps and other mass and volume measuring devices and 60 organizations accredited to inspect electricity and natural gas meters.

The registration program is available in the retail gas, retail food, dairy, fishing, forestry, mining, downstream petroleum and grain and field crop sectors. There are presently 44 organizations registered to inspect scales, gas pumps and other mass and volume devices.

Over the past year, Measurement Canada has performed in-depth stakeholder consultations in the chemical products, food and beverage manufacturing, fruits and vegetables and livestock and poultry sectors. The scope of the registration program may be expanded to include these sectors in the next year depending on the stakeholder consensus-based recommendations resulting from consultations in these sectors. However, registration program requirements will not change.

Measurement Canada audits the competencies of accredited and registered organizations on a regular basis to ensure compliance with program criteria and retention of required competencies.

Further information concerning the accreditation program and the registration program may be found on Measurement Canada's

website at [http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/mc-mc.nsf/eng/h\\_lm00003.html](http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/mc-mc.nsf/eng/h_lm00003.html)

In regard to c) The salaries of accredited and registered organizations are paid by the companies, e.g., service station retailers, grocery store owners, who hire them to test and certify their devices. In the case of electricity and natural gas meters owned by accredited utilities, the salaries are paid by the utility.

\* \* \*

• (1520)

[English]

**QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS**

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if the answers to Questions Nos. 13, 109, 111 and 151 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[Text]

**Question No. 13—Hon. Judy Sgro:**

With respect to the Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP), when will the government have the necessary administrative mechanisms in place so that Canadians can benefit from the RDSP program?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 109—Ms. Meili Faille:**

With respect to performance pay for the Chief Executives of Crown corporations in 2008, for each individual, without identifying him or her by name: (a) what is his or her level in the salary scale; (b) what is his or her performance appraisal rating; (c) what is the maximum bonus, in percentage terms, which he or she could be entitled to receive; (d) what was the amount of the bonus paid, as a percentage of salary; and (e) what was the amount of the bonus paid, in dollars?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 111—Mr. Michael Savage:**

With regard to Employment Insurance: (a) how many part-time staff have been hired since June 2008, by month; (b) how many full-time staff have been hired since June 2008, by month; (c) how many part-time and full-time staff have been hired in each region since June 2008, by month; and (d) how many service telephone lines are working in each region and how many of these telephone lines are staffed at one time?

(Return tabled)

**Question No. 151—Mr. Peter Julian:**

With respect to the government's hospitality spending: (a) how much did the government spend on the purchase of alcoholic drinks for hospitality purposes including wine, beer and hard liquor, during receptions and other similar events, such as lunches, dinners, meetings, and all such similar gatherings, hosted in the Parliamentary precinct, for the fiscal year 2007-2008; and (b) what departmental measures are in place to monitor expenditures on alcohol at public expense?

(Return tabled)

S. O. 52

[English]

### STARRED QUESTIONS

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if the answers to Starred Questions Nos. 115 and 116 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[Text]

\*Question No. 115—**Mr. Glen Pearson:**

With regard to the regional development agency for Southern Ontario mentioned in the 2009 budget: (a) what economic studies were conducted by the government with respect to the creation of a separate regional development agency for Southern Ontario, (i) when did these studies begin, (ii) which stakeholders, organizations, municipal governments were consulted, (iii) how much money has been earmarked for this new agency by the government, (iv) were any of the Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDC's) consulted and, if so, which ones; (b) which federal electoral ridings will be under the jurisdiction of this new agency; (c) have any Aboriginal communities been consulted, especially on the Six Nations and New Credit reserves and, if so, which ones; (d) will the new agency be modeled after any of the existing regional development agencies; (e) will the new agency have a dedicated Minister, Assistant Deputy Minister and, if not, under which department will the new agency be governed; (f) what is the government's planned date for this new agency to be fully operational; (g) have any rural groups, organizations, stakeholders been consulted in terms of the scope or mandate of this new agency and, if so, which ones; (h) what will be the mandate of this new agency; (i) what, if any, are the specific programs this agency has already committed to support and in which town or cities are these programs based; (j) what specific programs will this agency invest that will help workers, communities and businesses in Southern Ontario position themselves to take advantage of opportunities, as economic growth recovers in Canada and around the world; and (k) will the \$20 million earmarked for the Eastern Ontario Development Program as stated in the 2009 Budget be in addition to the promised \$1 billion for the new Southern Ontario agency, or will this \$20 million come out of the \$1 billion budget?

(Return tabled)

\*Question No. 116—**Mr. Glen Pearson:**

With regards to the announcement that the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) will steer its foreign aid toward a smaller pool of 20 countries, down from 25 announced under the previous government in 2005; (a) what were the criteria established by the department by which countries were, (i) removed from the 2005 list, (ii) were added to the new list of recipients; (b) when did consultation begin to discuss removing or adding countries from focus list; (c) who took part in these discussions; (d) were any non-governmental organizations, multilateral organizations, church organizations or any other third party stakeholders consulted about the proposed changes to CIDA's focus list and, if so, which ones specifically; (e) how specifically were the obligations of the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act taken into consideration by the Agency when establishing criteria for adding or removing countries and how were the perspectives of the poor taken into account during the decision making process; (f) when, how and by who were countries who were removed from the list informed of CIDA's decision; (g) what are the projected funds to be delivered to each specific country on the new focus list; (h) what are the specific programs to be funded in each country on the new focus list; (i) does CIDA have on-ground field workers in each of the countries on the new focus list and, if so, how many; and (j) what accountability measures are being put in place in each of the new countries of focus to ensure that the provisions of the Act are being adhered to?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

\* \* \*

### REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

CHALK RIVER NUCLEAR FACILITIES

**The Speaker:** The Chair has received a request for an emergency debate from the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley. I will hear the hon. member now.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, New Democrats are requesting this debate at this important juncture because of the recent shutdown of the NRU reactors at Chalk River, which provide 80% of the medical isotopes to the Canadian medical system. They have shut down again within 18 months. We do not know how long the shutdown will be, but it will be a minimum of 30 days and upwards of 60 days.

We are receiving letters from health professionals across the country and Canadians who are in cancer treatment. They are looking for some assurance from Parliament as to what the future holds in terms of the Chalk River facilities. Four-fifths of the world's reactors are also shut down at this time, this following a year and a half after Canada put the world on notice for not having a reliable reactor.

It is up to the will of Parliament to address this question, find the answers that are necessary for Canadians and give some certainty as to what the future holds in terms of medical isotopes.

**The Speaker:** I want to thank the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley for bringing this matter to the attention of the House.

I am sure the issue he has raised is a serious one. The question that is of course in my mind is whether it is one that at this moment requires an emergency debate in the House.

I note that the matter was dealt with in the House on an emergency basis some time ago, at the last closure, by the introduction of legislation that was dealt with, as I say, on an urgent priority basis.

At the moment I am not inclined to grant the request for a debate, but I stress that I say "at the moment". However, possibly developments that occur in the course of the next few days may result in a further request. If that is the case, I would be more than happy to entertain the request and to deal with it if something else transpires.

In the circumstances, I am going to suggest that we leave the matter for the time being. I say "at this time" only. I thank the hon. member for raising it.

## 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.

**The Speaker:** When this matter was last before the House, the hon. member for Beaches—East York had the floor. There are 16 minutes remaining in the time allotted for her remarks.

I call upon the hon. member for Beaches—East York for the conclusion of her remarks.

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as I was saying before question period started, this bill cannot be taken lightly and serious questions need to be answered.

One cannot discuss this bill without talking about, for instance, the human rights issue in Colombia. We all know that in the last number of years three million persons have been internally displaced. This figure is astronomical; it is only second to that of Sudan. We see Sudan on the television much more regularly, but we do not see Colombia as often. We see the drug lords, the paramilitary and all that, but we do not really understand when we do not see the three million people who have been displaced.

Who are these people? These are poor people, farmers, people who are being abused. In the first half of 2008 alone, 270,000 people were displaced. This is the highest rate in the past 23 years. This is not a positive trend. It is something that should concern us a great deal.

Again, as in all conflicts around the world, women in particular are vulnerable to the displacement. Women and children always bear the brunt of any conflict or any instability. This is nothing new, and it is no different in Colombia. We see this again. It shows up in our figures.

This is occurring in areas that are rich in crops, rich in minerals and rich in oil and gas. What does that mean? This is land that has a lot to offer. It means that Canadian companies that may be exploring for gas, for minerals would actually be in this area. The economic development taking place would be in those areas where people have been forced off their lands and sometimes killed.

The people are being displaced by the millions. It is not by a few, but by the millions, not that any would be acceptable. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have been watching and monitoring this for some time.

The economic development in these areas would be at the expense of millions of people who would be forced off their lands. Many have already been forced off their lands. This goes very much to a justice issue and to a human rights issue.

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Innocent civilians, mostly rural people, are the ones who are paying the price in a different way. As some of us may know, there was a push on the part of the government to identify and kill the paramilitaries and the drug lords. What happened is what we call false positives. Innocent civilians have been killed and are being killed by Colombian military, then they are dressed up as rebels and being used as proof that rebels were killed in combat.

President Uribe from Colombia had initially backed the military saying that none of this was true, but he later announced 27 soldiers and 3 generals were being dismissed as the result of 11 specific killings. This is a horrible situation. In addition to the displacement, innocent people are being killed and dressed up in pretense of the bodies being paramilitary.

It seems that the military is under tremendous pressure to demonstrate that it is actually succeeding and getting rid of the paramilitaries, the drug lords and so on, but killing innocent people and putting them forward as such is not the answer. Again, that is a horrendous human rights abrogation that needs to be 100% stopped, not just in part. There are over 1,000 victims, dating back 2003. Many of these young people from poor areas were actually paraded in such a manner. I think this is totally unacceptable. We need to take these things into consideration when we look at this trade bill.

• (1525)

For years, President Uribe publicly denied that the problem even existed. However, as we have seen, he fired members of his own military when he was forced to deal with the fact that it is happening, and it continues to happen to this day, according to Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

Corruption is another critical area. Politicians and military being linked to paramilitaries and drug lords is a common discussion. Again, both Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International continue to talk about this and continue to mention the crises in this area.

Because of this, it is essential that the government does a human rights impact assessment before any free trade agreement is implemented or passed in the House. A human rights impact assessment is absolutely critical to ascertain what is happening, to what extent innocent people are being killed, abducted and removed every day for the sake of economic progress.

These recommendations are not new and they are not new to the government. In fact, all the government members supported it. The recommendations from the report of the Standing Committee on International Trade entitled "Human Rights, the Environment and Free Trade with Colombia" stated that improvements needed with regard to displacement, labour laws and accountability for crime have to happen before a bill goes through and that government must show a more constructive attitude to human rights groups in the country, again, before any bill goes through.

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This again was supported by all members on all sides of the House. None of these recommendations were considered before an agreement was signed in November 2008, before the report was even tabled in the House. I find that very disturbing. The reason the standing committee did all that work was to address these issues. They need to be addressed in this instance; otherwise, we will be an accomplice, in a sense, to what is going on.

Let us look for a moment at labour. Colombia has led the world in the killing of trade unionists. Some 2,600 people have died since 1986. Just imagine, 2,600 unionists, union leaders, trade leaders have died since 1986. If that were to happen anywhere else in the world, we would be appalled. This is what is happening in Colombia. Mostly this has been attributed to paramilitary groups who have deliberately targeted unionists who have been getting in the way, by giving people rights, employment rights. The paramilitary does not want any of that.

More than 400 of them were killed under Uribe's government. So the killings go on. While it has come down somewhat, it is still going on, and 60% of all trade union related deaths in the world occurred in Colombia last year. That is a huge number.

As a result of pressure, some changes have happened in Colombia. Some of the pressure has come from the United States. Violence has been the major roadblock for the U.S. government signing the FTA with Colombia, so Colombia has made some efforts to deal with the problems of impunity and in the justice system. That has brought down some of the problem, but it has not resolved it.

In response, again to the U.S. Congress, Colombia was prompted to work with international labour organizations to improve the situation of trade unionists being killed or abducted. All this activity has resulted in the appointment of specialized staff for a prosecutor's office to effectively prosecute those responsible for assassination of union members.

That is a good move, obviously, and some things are beginning to change. However, when we look at the statistics, in 97% of the cases there have been no convictions. The convictions were consistently low under Uribe, but they jumped to 43% in 2007, and 53% as of October, resulting from pressure from the U.S. Again, the lack of convictions was high in the early parts of Uribe's administration and they have jumped up. With the insistence and with pressure from the United States and others, we can see that is having some impact.

● (1530)

The labour side agreement that is part of the bill is not as strong as the NAFTA labour agreement and the government is subject to a fine to a maximum of \$15 million but this does not help labour in any way. Labour does not have a say. Labour is not part of the dispute mechanism and therefore it does not improve the situation in any way. Again, not only does the labour agreement need to be stronger than NAFTA but not weaker. That needs to have a proper assessment. It needs to be looked at and it needs to be assessed.

The tribunal that has been set up for disputes I do not think will be very effective. As I said, it does not have legal representation on the tribunal. We cannot have a situation where money is fined but the government makes the decisions and labour is not part of it. Labour is an intrinsic part of this. What has been happening to the labour

movement in Colombia is absolutely atrocious. It is an issue of human rights. In order to protect the labour movement, it needs to be part and parcel of the decision and the side deal needs to be strengthened. Otherwise, it will be meaningless.

President Uribe indicated more recently that he wants to amend the constitution to run for a third time, which is another troublesome part of this whole area. He now has a popular rating approval of 70% to 80%, so this is not out of the realm of possibility that he will actually do this. However, this would have serious implications for democracy if this were to move forward. Yes, he has support of 70% to 80% because to some degree violence has come down, but it does not address the large number of issues that I just mentioned before in regard to the large number of people who have been displaced, the labour movement and corruption.

It is very troublesome when a government comes to the end of its term and then decides to amend the constitution to give itself more time. That is not the mark of a strong democracy nor will it help to stabilize the situation in Colombia.

In several instances Uribe has denied problems existed but then has only acted under pressure from the U.S. when it found that in fact there was a problem and he had to hold the assassins of the trade unionists accountable.

I can give other examples. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have pointed out that an arrangement was made with the United States to extradite drug lords to the U.S. to be tried only for drug trafficking and not for the human rights atrocities and for the killings and murders that they committed in Colombia. Some of them have been convicted for up to 20 years in jail but are not facing war criminal charges.

Again, the international community should be concerned about this. By extraditing them to the U.S. to be tried under drug laws is serious, but it is almost nothing compared to what they should be getting. They should be tried in the proper courts for crimes against humanity. This is something that needs to be looked at and discussed. Serious human rights implications must be addressed and are not being addressed. This is why an independent human rights impact assessment is needed before any document is signed. It is needed badly. As I said at the outset, the Conservative government is moving toward tied aid. This is an area that really bothers me to no end tremendously.

*Government Orders*

If a South American country wants aid, then it had better sign a free trade agreement, it seems. This what the government seems essentially to be saying. If there is a free trade agreement, then there will be aid. Aid should not be tied to a free trade agreement and should not be tied to Canada's economic success. It should be untied aid. Otherwise, we are being total hypocrites and we might as well shut down the Canadian International Development Agency completely. This is totally unacceptable.

● (1535)

That is why the government is abandoning Africa. Again, it goes back to that. We do not hear any economic bilateral agreement in any of the discussion with Africa.

We must ask a number of questions. Tied aid is unacceptable. Tying our economic success to free trade is not acceptable. We should be working for the benefit of the country. That is what international aid is about.

The government should slow the bill down and do a human rights impact assessment immediately because that has a social impact as well. A stronger labour side agreement needs to happen. What we have now is not good enough.

A CIDA assessment needs to be done. The House is owed a report from the minister responsible for CIDA telling us what kind of development assessment CIDA has done and what it has to say about how this trade agreement would impact the poor people of Colombia. Is it going to hurt them or is it going to benefit them? If the balance of the trade agreement is negative for the poor people of Colombia, then the government and Parliament has no business approving this document.

**Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the fact is Colombia is a country facing ongoing challenges.

I had the opportunity to travel there last May with several members of the committee and I saw firsthand the challenges it is facing. I also saw some of the great advances it has made, especially within Bogota, which has a population of approximately seven million people. It is a very progressive city with a university. There is excitement and enthusiasm on the part of the younger generation who see opportunities with the advancement of trade. They hope to learn from countries such as Canada.

We had an opportunity to see firsthand some of the Canadian companies. They act as role models with their social-corporate responsibility and are providing proper human rights and labour standards for other countries to follow. As a matter of fact, Connie Watson, who is a Latin American correspondent for CBC News, followed us around.

A leader of the trade committee asked local officials if the free trade deal would help the situation or not and the overwhelming response was yes. They welcome investment, especially with respect to roads, schools and jobs for the displaced people, 40% of whom cannot find work in the city.

If we exclude this agreement and just leave Colombia to the status quo, how would that advance the cause of human rights and the economic opportunities that the Colombians see through a free trade agreement?

● (1540)

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Mr. Speaker, I am not suggesting that nothing is going right in Colombia, that there are not some good things happening. I mentioned them in my speech.

I do believe that human rights issues are not automatically resolved by the signing of a free trade agreement. As we have seen in some other parts of the world, trade agreements tend to help those who are already well off and those who are poor tend to be left behind.

In and of itself, Colombia does not address human rights situations. Colombia has a specific huge humanitarian problem with displacement and the forcing of people off their lands, which are very rich in minerals and oil. It also has a problem with the killings and so on.

As a result of the unique situation in Colombia, it is important that we do a human rights impact assessment and that we include in the body of the agreement human rights, social and labour issues. They need to be part of the agreement, otherwise it will make matters worse.

I am not suggesting that everything in Colombia is bad, but when we look at the whole picture, the situation is far too serious. Human rights abrogations are far too serious. Instability is still far too serious. The activities of the paramilitary and the drug lords are still far too aggressive and are still going on in parts of the country. People are still being displaced and pushed off their lands. Human rights abrogations are going on every day. We need to ensure that this agreement deals with those assessments before it is signed.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would truly like the member to tell us whether or not the Liberal Party will support Bill C-23, Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act.

I believe she said that an independent body must monitor the evolution of human and labour rights and environmental standards. That was one of the committee's recommendations that the Liberal Party supported at the time. According to the Liberal critic for international trade, and despite the Liberal platitudes about an independent body to monitor and, above all, guarantee ongoing improvement in human rights, it seems that the Liberal Party will support Bill C-23 even before the committee's recommendations are considered and implemented.

What is the real position of the Liberal Party on Bill C-23? Will it vote for implementation of the Colombia free trade agreement?

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• (1545)

[English]

**Hon. Maria Minna:** What I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is that the bill needs to be changed, that the standing committee report needs to be taken into consideration, and that there is time for the government to take another look at this bill, to take into consideration the standing committee report which addresses the issue of human rights along with the labour and environmental side deals. We are asking, as many other members have already mentioned, that there be an environmental impact assessment done.

I am personally also saying, because of my own work in this area, that the minister responsible for CIDA should also come forward with some recommendations and an assessment to show the benefits or lack thereof that this bill would in fact provide for the vulnerable people of Colombia.

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, pardon me for being astounded. The Liberal member for Beaches—East York spoke for 20 minutes against the Colombia trade deal and I will guarantee, because I have seen it before, that when it comes to a vote, even without all the human rights and environmental amendments she talked about, the Liberal Party is going to vote for this trade deal. Does anyone know why? It is because the leader of the Liberal Party rejected the letter that was signed by 50 prominent Canadians, including Naomi Klein and Stephen Lewis, telling members not to vote in favour of this deal. Yet, he rejected it.

It reminded me of a previous Liberal leader who spent lots of energy talking about the Liberal Party being against NAFTA, against free trade with the U.S., but immediately after the election, after the party came to power, guess what, free trade and NAFTA continued. We know that this trade deal has very similar wording, such as chapter 11 of NAFTA, which allows big corporations to sue local, provincial and even Canadian governments if they deem it. They have the ability to challenge legitimate Canadian environmental, labour and social protections.

I want a yes or no answer. Without these kinds of amendments, will the member stand in the House and vote against this trade deal?

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Mr. Speaker, first, I do not need any lessons from the hon. member and I do not accept her premise of what I said in the House.

I did not say that I supported or did not support the bill. What I have said is I am not against free trade per se, but this bill in particular needs to be reviewed and needs to be changed. I thought we were here to debate this and to decide what happens from here.

Some changes need to be made to the bill and I ask the government, in the process of this debate, to take the bill back and at least go through the recommendation made by the standing committee to do a proper human rights assessment and then come back to the House with it. The government may choose not to do that, but I am spending my time here today because I feel we need to be having an open debate and discussion on what is going on and improving some things if possible.

I have identified a number of areas where I believe the bill could use a tremendous amount of improvement and further study. I

suggest that some of those are the human rights impact, definitely the labour side deal because it is not strong enough and does not even meet the NAFTA standards, as well as the environmental aspects. As well, the CIDA minister needs to come up with a recommendation.

The bill needs a great deal of work done to it. Some of these things need to be done. I ask the government, at this stage, to take a look at some of the suggestions that have been made in the House and hopefully decide to bring to bear the kinds of things about which we have talked.

[Translation]

**Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is not in favour of Bill C-23. I will start by giving the main reasons why we are opposed to this bill, and then I will explain some of those reasons.

It seems to us that the federal government's main motivation in entering into this free trade agreement is not trade—members will see why we say that—but investment, because the agreement contains a chapter on investment protection. The agreement will therefore make things easier for Canadian investors, especially in the mining sector, and we know that there is considerable interest in investing in Colombia.

That is the main motivation, in our opinion, but judging by all the investment protection agreements Canada has signed over the years, the one that would bind Canada and Colombia would be ill conceived.

All these agreements contain clauses that enable foreign investors to sue the local 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 this country, where the need for progress is great. This is serious, and I would like to hear what my Liberal colleague has to say about it.

In fact, Colombia has one of the worst human rights records in the world, and certainly in Latin America. To advance human rights around the world, governments—those willing, that is—use a carrot and stick approach. They support efforts to improve respect for human rights and reserve the right to take away privileges if progress slides back.

With this free trade agreement, Canada would forego any ability to bring pressure to bear. In fact, not only would it give up the possibility of using the carrot and stick approach, but it would be surrendering all power to the Colombian government.

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To convince us of its good intentions, the government keeps saying that this agreement would come with a companion agreement on labour and another one on the environment. The fact of the matter is that such agreements are notoriously ineffective. Unless they are part of the free trade agreement, which they are not, investors could destroy with impunity Colombia's rich natural environment, displace populations to facilitate mine development or continue murdering unionists. Companion agreements cannot be used against any of this if they are not part of the free trade agreement.

As for the free trade agreement per se, the Bloc Québécois is against trading off the government's ability to press for human rights to provide Canadian corporations with foreign investment opportunities.

We must ask ourselves what is the purpose of a bilateral free trade agreement with Colombia like the one with Peru. I could quote figures, but for the benefit of those listening, I will simply say that statistics do not show a substantial increase in trade, but only a slight one.

• (1550)

This situation is an exception to the usual signing of a free trade agreement, because they are usually made between special trading partners who trade sufficiently to make it worthwhile to lower trade barriers.

The Colombian market and trade with Colombia are not particularly sizeable. The products Canada primarily sells there, such as western grain, can be sold easily elsewhere, especially during this crisis, and Quebec and Canadian exporters will see only limited benefit at best from the conclusion of this agreement.

Some Canadian businesses might be interested, but we fail to see what attraction there might be for people in Quebec and Canada. In fact, from what we can see, this free trade agreement mostly protects Canadian investors and investments in the mining sector. That is of greater interest to Canadian investors and to the government, which is sensitive to their lobbying.

I have to say here that we do not oppose investment agreements, but we oppose bad investment agreements, and this appears to be one.

Indirect foreign investment is growing exponentially. In order to create a predictable environment and ensure that a foreign investor does not end up losing his assets or being nationalized without compensation—this is the example always cited, as happened with oil in some instances—countries conclude treaties to protect investments. We have nothing against that.

The first Canada-U.S. free trade agreement, the FTA, which included a section on investment protection, chapter 16, was the first agreement in the world to include a dispute resolution mechanism, which the two countries could use. I emphasize that it was between Canada and the United States, two countries with major trading activities and able to negotiate for their mutual benefit.

There was a dispute resolution mechanism available to the two countries. The agreement worked well. No discriminatory measures were taken against a foreign investor and no case was submitted to the arbitration tribunal. And yet, during the five years the agreement

was in force, the value of Canadian investments rose by 41%. So it was not a bad agreement.

However, when it came to negotiating NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement between Canada, the United States and Mexico, these three countries driving the negotiations wanted to change the agreement on investment because of unreasonable concerns about the risks run by investors in Mexico.

Under chapter 11, foreign investors may apply directly to international tribunals, circumventing the filter of public good provided by the governments. This is not insignificant. It means that companies can apply on their own to international tribunals, whereas under the FTA, governments alone could do so. That is a big difference.

• (1555)

The results can be very different depending on whether companies or countries make such applications.

The word expropriation had a specific meaning in chapter 16 and a different one in chapter 11. It is so broad a concept that any legislation that might have the effect of reducing an investor's profits can be deemed expropriation and result in a lawsuit. Foreign investors are allowed to go before international tribunals. Moreover, they can interpret the law in such a way that, if the government of a particular country passes legislation that reduces the value of their investments in any way at all, they can equate these losses to expropriation and launch a lawsuit. The amount of the suit is not limited to the value of the investment but includes all possible future profits. It is very abusive.

This chapter was denounced by everyone. If legislation to protect the environment reduces a foreign investor's profits, the government is exposed to fabulous lawsuits. Despite all that, Ottawa signed several bilateral agreements over the years that are copied from chapter 11 of NAFTA. The criticism reached such a pitch, though, that the Liberals eventually stopped signing these kinds of agreements.

I want to digress a bit. I took part in the election in which Jean Chrétien promised to do all he could about the free trade agreement, the FTA. We know what happened then. Not only did he sign it, but he went on to conclude several others and became the great propagandist of free trade agreements. Under the Conservatives, Ottawa is back on the offensive and negotiating numerous agreements of this kind. In the one with Colombia, the Conservative government cedes to multinationals the right to determine the public interest.

The Bloc Québécois will therefore oppose the bill to implement this free trade agreement because of the clauses it contains that are copied from chapter 11 of NAFTA. We want the government to return to the old format for these agreements, which did not give the multinationals a free hand at the expense of the public interest. We are in favour of free trade, but not under any conditions at all.

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We do not want conditions that will make people's lives worse, especially when the people in question have no other recourse, like the Colombians in this case. They have virtually no individual or trade union rights and are at the mercy of investors whose strong, violent mercenaries will stop at nothing to achieve their ends.

A number of other members and I met with some individuals—trade unionists and people from NGOs—who had been designated by the people in villages under siege from multinationals to come and explain the situation to us.

• (1600)

There are human rights abuses. The Conservatives tell us over and over that things are improving and the situation is less catastrophic than before. The truth is that the human rights situation is quite a bit worse than it used to be. Most violations are committed by paramilitary groups and human rights workers are worried about the ties between these groups and the government.

I have a few statistics. In 2008, the crimes committed by these paramilitary groups increased by 41% in comparison with a 14% increase 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. It is impossible to say under these conditions that there is any respect for human rights.

As for workers' rights, we realize this is one of the world's worst places for respecting them. Trade unionists are targeted for their activities. I have met a number of them. They told us they cannot not live freely. They are in hiding constantly. They are afraid of being shot point blank. And their fear is not groundless, because, since 1986, 2,690 trade unionists have been assassinated. It could be said that the number of murders has decreased somewhat, but, in 2007, 39 unionists were murdered—nearly one a week—and, in 2008, 48 were murdered. This is not a situation in which union members can be said to be able to exercise their right to exert pressure. As one union vice-president put it, thousands of people have disappeared, and unions continue to be persecuted.

Population displacement in Colombia is often the result of conflicts opposing government security forces, paramilitary groups and guerrillas. However, economic displacement is increasingly frequent. In most cases, the people displaced receive no compensation. Various means are used to force people from a given location: pressure tactics, threats, murders and land flooding. There are also stories of the many people living in small villages, in clearings near the sites of mines rich in various minerals, being forcibly moved off in all sorts of imaginable and unimaginable ways in order to make room for investors. There is nowhere for them to go. The American State Department and Amnesty International say that another 305,000 persons were displaced in 2007. There had been a lot before then. In 2008, over 380,000 persons had to flee their homes. In fact, since 1985, nearly 4.6 million persons have been forced to leave their homes and their land.

The Conservative government can go on saying that the human rights situation has improved, but Colombia is second only to Sudan in the greatest number of internally displaced persons. That is really something. That is an understatement. Would Canada be prepared to sign a free trade agreement with Sudan?

There may of course be side deals, but I have said such agreements are ineffective. I see no way of improving this agreement without it being changed very significantly.

• (1605)

As we do not see any such improvements appearing, we think that the free trade agreement presented here for implementation will in no way help the people of Colombia, Quebec and Canada.

• (1610)

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to say that my hon. colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île made an extremely interesting presentation. She brought up new points that we had not heard so far concerning human rights in Colombia. She has a great deal of experience with free trade, human rights and the various countries involved.

Instead of putting us in front of a *fait accompli* and a free trade agreement already signed by both countries, would it not have been better if the government had first asked the members of this House for their opinions? It could have made an effort to find out what impact this agreement would have on human rights and inform the members of this House of the real reasons why it was signed.

**Ms. Francine Lalonde:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague. Knowledge comes to members as they accumulate age and experience. It is true that, over the years that I have been here, there has been much talk about free trade in the House of Commons.

This topic was discussed when NAFTA was signed, and we pointed out how ridiculous chapter 11 was. It allowed companies to apply directly to international tribunals, thereby depriving states of the opportunity to defend themselves.

I did not get the chance to mention this, but the concept of expropriation under this agreement is such that improved conditions for the citizens could be construed as having a negative impact on the potential for profits and, thus, through great lawyers using fancy words, be considered justification for expropriation. Such is the meaning of this agreement. Therefore, we must be extremely careful.

I come from the labour movement. I know that good negotiations require a good balance of power. This does not mean that the parties are fighting one another, but one party has the opportunity to discuss with the other because the latter cannot impose its will on the former. In this case, the parties are Colombia and Canada. Of course, Canada has the upper hand. All Colombia can "sell" to Canada is mining investments. When we examine the issue from every angle, that is what matters, and unfortunately, these mining investments are what is making life difficult for the people. It could not be any other way.

The Colombian government can say all it wants. While a few benefits here and there may come from this agreement, overall, it will be detrimental to the Colombian people and it will tilt the balance of power toward the government and away from the people.



*Government Orders*

•(1615)

**Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I greatly appreciated my hon. colleague's speech. I agree with several of the points she raised. I think, however, that it is important to highlight a few things about that speech.

The situation in Colombia can be said to be mixed. It is true that there are massive population displacements as well as human rights violations. That is terrible. Colombia is not the only country in that part of the world where this happens, though; there are many. It is also important to point out that, in some segments of the population and some parts of the country, the situation has improved.

I clearly recall the situation in Medellin, for instance. There was a time when no one could go out on its streets. Today, the city is undergoing a great deal of development. It has changed dramatically over the past 10 years.

Our colleague said that this agreement cannot do any good for the people of Colombia. But will it make things worse? I am not sure that it will—

**The Deputy Speaker:** I have to interrupt the hon. member to give the hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île enough time to answer.

**Ms. Francine Lalonde:** Mr. Speaker, my answer will have to be brief.

I think that it will because of the provision concerning investments. We must not underestimate what that will entail. These investments are not made in cities, but over large areas, in the forests and savannahs where the people live.

Think of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the massive mining investments made in that country and the resulting loss of quality of life for the people. Those who live in a village may not have much to eat, but they can live from agriculture and gathering. It is a living.

However, when a mining company moves in and starts digging, putting up buildings, sending dust flying in the air or using chemicals in processing the minerals extracted, the people's lives are turned upside down. They have no control over that and know nothing about those things. In addition, without unions—

**The Deputy Speaker:** I have to interrupt the hon. member so that another question can be asked.

The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I was very interested in what my colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île had to say. I know she has a lot of experience in the union movement and with human rights.

The Conservatives, through the minister, claimed earlier that trade unionists are in favour of this agreement. He said all the unions support the agreement, even though that is absurd.

The Liberals claim that human rights associations support the agreement. That is just a way of justifying—a little—the fact that both the Conservatives and the Liberals are in favour of the agreement.

So far as the hon. member knows, is there a single organization with a good reputation on human rights or a single real union that supports this agreement?

**Ms. Francine Lalonde:** Mr. Speaker, the people I know from these groups are utterly opposed to the agreement, not for what I would call futile reasons but for reasons they can justify.

When social conditions and human rights are like those in Colombia, the logic behind free trade agreements means that they cannot have any other result than to reinforce the power of the government and rich people and ensure that the underground resources benefit foreigners much more than Colombians.

•(1620)

[English]

**The Deputy Speaker:** It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Willowdale, Infrastructure; the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Government Spending; the hon. member for Sudbury, Financial Institutions.

**Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as we debate Bill C-23 today, the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, we join with other nations and their leaders as they ponder the issue of free trade in general and free trade with Colombia specifically. With the current turmoil we find in the global economic system and within major economies across the world, including our own, there is a natural inclination to pause with respect to trade agreements like the one we debate today.

While there is a temptation to close the doors and shutter down during the economic storm, for countries like Canada trade is at the very core of our prosperity. We are a trading nation and we rely on the success of our trade relationships for economic growth and continued prosperity.

In times like these it is tempting to show reluctance for open trade and in its place to seek protectionist policies. However, we only need to look to the 1930s and the passage of the Smoot-Hawley tariff act in the United States that was protectionist in nature and that clearly contributed to the further collapse of the world economic system.

My point is simply that trade for a country like ours is essential and must be encouraged.

Free trade relationships can be of significant advantage for Canada and for emerging economies with which we sign agreements as they continue their development process.

The question at hand today is not only the beneficial effects of free trade relationships but the ancillary issues that we must consider when entering into such agreements.

Colombia is certainly a nation that has struggled almost since its inception as the Republic of Colombia in 1886. We note that what is now modern day Panama seceded from Colombia in 1903. From the point of arrival of Spanish explorers in 1499 through to independence of 1819 and the departure of Gran Colombia, as it was known then by the current nations of Venezuela and Ecuador, Colombia has known periods of considerable instability.

### *Government Orders*

In more modern times, we also reflect sadly upon the tumultuous 40-year civil conflict that has claimed between 70,000 and 100,000 lives. Through it all, Colombia has struggled to grow economically, socially and politically.

Despite internal conflicts that affect Colombia, for a period of almost 30 years, beginning in 1970, the country's gross domestic products grew at an average rate of 4% per year. A recessionary period in 1999 consumed the nation for several years but into the new century growth was steady and in 2007 it was 8.2% of GDP.

The International Monetary Fund reported Colombia's GDP at \$202 billion U.S. dollars in 2007. This was the fourth largest economy in South America. It must be conceded, however, that while these numbers are impressive, much of the wealth has remained concentrated in the hands of a small percentage of the country's population and this must be addressed in the future.

While a seemingly chronic issue for developing nations, it is something we must keep in mind as we debate Bill C-23 and the potential benefits that we hope will accrue to the general population of Colombia.

Colombia's economy has strong areas of growth and interesting aspects to it. For example, the massive United States market is supplied with 70% of its imported flowers from the nation of Colombia alone. In 2007, the American publication *Business Week* magazine named Colombia the "most extreme emerging economy on earth".

• (1625)

Colombia's modern history was significantly altered with the election of the current president in August 2002. President Alvaro Uribe Velez has certainly changed the political landscape of Colombia. His administration has been marked by reform, significant progress on the internal conflict that has ravaged Colombia and a more practical approach to the economic challenges that have faced his country.

It is important to note that the presidency is set to change in 2010 when President Uribe reaches the constitutional limits and, therefore, cannot seek re-election. However, if a referendum recently approved by the Colombian Senate proceeds, he will have the opportunity to seek a third term. Most people will, of course, hope that reform and continuing economic growth will continue regardless of this political reality.

This abbreviated picture of Colombia's political and economic status is important as we consider Bill C-23, the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement that is before this House today. While economics and politics are enormous, when considering the approval of the free trade agreement with any nation so, too, are issues of social justice and civility.

Significant concerns have been expressed by various groups and individuals as the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement is being debated not only in this House but across Canada. Just yesterday in *The Toronto Star*, the editorial board of the newspaper bluntly stated, in reference to Bill C-23, that "the bill deserves closer scrutiny".

While we in Canada debate this free trade agreement, we are joined in such deliberations by the United States officials, most

notably in the senate where ratification of the treaty signed by the previous administration in 2006 proceeds quite slowly.

The new president, Barack Obama, has enunciated his support of the United States-Colombia free trade agreement. However, there are concerns within the senate with respect to the situation in Colombia that could result in considerable delay in the passage of this treaty in the United States. President Obama's trade representative, Ron Kirk, is currently working with senators to "find a way forward".

With our largest trading partner, the United States, looking closely at its treaty, we can all be assured that what we do here in Canada will at least have some impact upon the American lawmakers. It is unlikely that should the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement pass here, the United States advocates of their treaty would not point out the possibility of putting their business at a disadvantage to their Canadian counterparts if the United States senate delayed too long.

With that in mind, we must look closely at the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, both from the perspective of our own country and the potential benefits to the average Colombian who might stand to benefit from improved trade relations.

In terms of Canada's economic interests, we export goods valued at approximately \$703 million per year. Colombia exports approximately \$643 million worth of goods to Canada. In context, Canada's 2008 gross domestic product was nearly \$1.5 trillion. Canadian companies have approximately \$750 million invested in Colombia.

The reality is simply that while Colombia is creating an emerging nation in South America and one of importance, current trade between Canada and Colombia remains relatively small. However, a ratified free trade agreement with Canada is significant both in terms of potential investment and trade but also more indirectly in terms of the statement it makes both domestically here in Canada and internationally with nations across the world considering similar arrangements.

In that context, what are some of the concerns that are being expressed by groups and individuals here in Canada and in other parts of the world? Human rights concerns are at the forefront of the statements being made by the various groups.

• (1630)

By way of example, today the lower house in Switzerland has received a letter signed by 33 non-governmental organizations asking that their country delay ratification of a European Union-Colombia free trade arrangement until their concerns are addressed with respect to human rights in Colombia. The letter speaks of what they call "serious and systematic" human rights violations.

Only a few days ago, the Reverend David Giuliano, the Moderator of the United Church of Canada, wrote that he "believed our trade needs to be restricted by ethical, environmental and moral considerations".

*Government Orders*

One source of the concerns with respect to Bill C-23 originated with the labour movement both in Canada and in other nations. Indeed, the national director of the United Steelworkers in Canada has announced it will host Colombia lawyer Yessika Hoyos Morales in Ottawa this week, as it enunciates its position with respect to the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement. Ms. Hoyos Morales is the daughter of the trade unionist who was murdered in Colombia eight years ago.

Many international human rights groups continue to express their concern about the arbitrary action with respect to labour leaders and labour movement activities in Colombia. Labour leaders across Canada and around the world report that over 2,700 labour leaders have been killed in Colombia over the past 10 years.

The issue of human rights is also a concern outside the labour movement in Colombia. The civil war and the conduct of paramilitary organizations is of grave concern to many observers throughout the world. For much of the most troubling period of the civil war in Colombia the loss of innocent lives at the hands of paramilitary organizations was characteristic of a seriously troubled nation.

A further area of concern centres on the ongoing problem of the illegal narcotics trade that has so troubled Colombia and the nations in which these drugs create incomprehensible social problems, including the criminal activities associated with the importation of illegal drugs.

It is reported that the Colombian drug cartels continue to supply virtually all the cocaine that is used illegally in the United States and is the most significant supplier to other nations in the world.

The effects of this problem is of course not only to be found in the United States, but also in Canada and within Colombia itself.

This ongoing problem must be addressed if there is to be any long-term stability for Colombia and if the country is to take its place in the world as a truly emerging economy, particularly within the context of the South American region.

These issues clearly need to be addressed and which we, as legislators, must take into consideration balanced, of course, by the significant progress that has been made over the last number of years, particularly by President Uribe's administration.

Many will argue quite legitimately that by engaging nations like Colombia in bilateral and multilateral trade agreements we are likely to encourage them to participate more fully within the world community. In so doing we can help them with many of the concerns that are raised both on a national and international level.

It is important and absolutely essential that as we debate Bill C-23, we weigh these issues against what is widely recognized as profound and significant progress that has taken place in Colombia over the past few years.

President Uribe is generally recognized to have a high level of support among Colombians as a result of his success in creating greater stability in the country and as a result a more vibrant and progressive economy.

The many successes of recent years against the FARC rebels has spread hope among Colombians that even greater stability can be achieved and therefore economic progress that would normally follows.

While much of the success that has been achieved in this area by the Colombian government fails to garner international headlines, we periodically witness profound success in this conflict.

In 2008 we witnessed the spectacular freeing of the former presidential candidate, Ingrid Betancourt, after having been held captive by rebels for almost six and a half years.

Kidnappings, a chronic problem in Colombia, have decreased in recent years, under President Uribe's leadership, to a 20 year low. Similarly the actions of paramilitary groups on the right have long been a terrible part of Colombia's modern history.

• (1635)

The Colombian government in recent years, through negotiations and enforcement action, has succeeded in reducing the action of these right-wing groups.

While there continues to be challenges that are certainly significant and the recently discovered involvement by some political figures is troubling, we must encourage the government to ensure that these individuals are being held to account. It is important that progress, however difficult, is indeed taking place.

In the area of criminal and civil strife, it is reported that homicides in Colombia have been reduced by 49% since 2002. Kidnappings, as noted before, are down by a percentage in the range of 85%.

We should also be concerned with respect to the displacement of people affected by the conflict within Colombia. It has been reported that over the course of the conflict, over three million Colombians have been displaced. These numbers are of course disturbing in a country with a population currently in the range of 45 million people. However, it is also important to note that from 2002 to the present, it has been reported that displacements of people have been significantly reduced.

Since 2002, the Colombian government has worked to improve health care for its citizens and infrastructure, particularly roads projects which are essential to improved domestic and international trade.

In terms of the illicit narcotics trade, progress has been made in the area as well. It has been reported that the amount of planting of illegal narcotics has in fact been reduced by 18% this past year after several years of increases.

My objective today has been to present both the legitimate concerns of many groups and individuals and also the points that have been put forward to support free trade and thus greater progress for Colombia.

As legislators, we are obliged to consider all aspects of the realities facing Colombia, its difficulties and successes as we move forward. We will always want to encourage Colombia to create an environment that helps all Colombians to achieve their fullest potential, live in safety and security and participate more fully in their country's political, economic and social life.

*Government Orders*

I encourage members to consider in a fair and balanced way all the issues associated with the debate on free trade with Colombia as we consider this issue both in the House and across the country.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for my colleague from Davenport, with whom I have worked on various committees. He generally knows his files very thoroughly.

He said right at the beginning of his speech that we should not be reluctant to liberalize trade and that trade was essential for Canada. We all certainly know that. The question we need to ask, though, is at what price. What if the price is the uprooting of people? Should we just close our eyes to what is going on in Colombia, things that Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International decry as infringements on human rights? Should we just close our eyes despite what several organizations came and told us at the round tables we held on the issue of Canadian mines, for example, and what they do in foreign countries?

We should not forget that Colombia is one of Canada's smallest trading partners. Our trade is hardly comparable. For example, Canada's grain exports could have the effect of swamping all of Colombia's small producers.

Our colleague stated some facts and explained a situation, but I did not really understand what his position is. Can he tell us? Is he for this agreement or against it?

• (1640)

**Mr. Mario Silva:** Mr. Speaker, I thank our colleague for her question.

In my remarks, I simply pointed out that certain things were occurring in Colombia, especially failures to respect human rights. It is terrible, it is true.

I am not opposed to the position of the Bloc and the NDP, which are critical of the terrible situations in this country in which human rights are not respected. However, some things have improved in this country over the years. It cannot be said that the situation is worsening year after year.

I know Colombia well. I do not know whether my colleague has visited Colombia, but I know it well. I have been there a number of times. In addition, I have Colombian friends familiar with the situation in their country. It has changed completely in recent years, particularly in some cities. I mentioned Medellín, for example. Ten years ago, it was nearly impossible to walk down the street. Today, people can go out, and there is a level of security that did not previously exist.

So, we can see certain changes, although the problems with the paramilitary continue. It is true. The situation is a very difficult one for the government. I would not like to be a member of the Colombian government right now, because the situation there is terrible. There are factions in the country—

**The Deputy Speaker:** I am sorry to have to interrupt the hon. member for Davenport, but I must give time to the other members to ask their questions.

The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

[*English*]

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the bill does not deal with labour rights protection and it fails to have any environmental protection. The investor chapter is modelled under chapter 11 of NAFTA, which allows foreign companies to sue Canadian governments, whether it is on the environmental, labour or social front.

Colombia has the worst human rights record in the western hemisphere and is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for trade unionists.

I do not quite understand whether the member for Davenport will vote in favour of the bill at second reading. If so, how would he justify the human rights violations and the environmental problems facing Colombia? The bill, as it is drafted right now, does not give any labour rights protection.

**Mr. Mario Silva:** Mr. Speaker, certain steps need to be taken. I am a member of trade committee and one of the first things we have to do is call for a human rights assessment. That needs to be done.

The second thing is to ensure that all those who want to speak to the issue, both from the human rights community and the business community, get an opportunity to speak before committee. It is important that we allow those individuals to come forward to give a wholesome view of what is taking place in Colombia. It is important to hear also from the people of Colombia. There is a possibility that trade committee might also visit Colombia.

The member might be surprised. I see issues of concern. I quite agree that there are a lot of human rights concerns. I have witnessed and heard about a lot of scary moments in Colombia. At the same time, I do not buy into the argument that by supporting this one could also be making the situation worse in Colombia. I want to hear the arguments before committee and then I will decide whether I will support it. That still needs to be fully debated.

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am quite fascinated to hear the member for Davenport making such remarks. I would think I were listening to a Conservative member of this House when he says that the situation has improved in Colombia, that he does not know whether he should support the agreement or not and that he would like to hear witnesses in committee. The facts are there. The situation has not improved that much. For example, nearly 90% of the trade unionists murdered in the world are murdered in Colombia.

How can the member for Davenport claim in this House that the situation has improved in Colombia when 90% of the trade unionists murdered in the world are murdered in Colombia? How can he make such contradictory statements?

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**Mr. Mario Silva:** Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether my colleague has had occasion to visit Colombia to see the situation there. It has improved in certain sectors, but it is true that this is not the case in all sectors. It is true, as he has said, that the situation for trade unionists in Colombia continues to be terrible. I do not argue with his position on the subject. But it is not the case in all sectors. Some have improved, but not all. I know Colombia well and have been there a number of times. The situation is not the same today as it was 10 years ago.

[*English*]

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am rising to speak in opposition to this bill. From the very good work the member for Burnaby—New Westminster has done, we know 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, is deeply flawed.

We have heard members in the House say that New Democrats are against trade. That is simply not the case. What New Democrats have consistently called for is fair trade. When we are talking about fair trade, it is important to talk about the fact that fair trade includes rules and agreements that promote sustainable practices, domestic job creation and healthy working conditions while allowing us to manage a supply of goods, promote democratic rights abroad and maintain democratic sovereignty at home.

Healthy working conditions include human rights. That is the aspect of this particular set of agreements that I want to focus on today. We have heard members say a number of times in the House that things have improved. I want to quote from a number of different reports which state that that is simply not the case. “Making a Bad Situation Worse: An Analysis of the Text of the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement” is an extensive report that looks at many aspects, including labour rights, the labour side of the agreement, the “Investment” chapter in the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, market access in agriculture and the environmental side of the agreement.

I want to focus on the human rights aspect. I want to quote from that report, because the people behind the report are the ones who have done the work. They are the people who can speak with credibility to what is happening in Colombia right now. They state in that report:

Trade can support development and the realization of human rights, if it brings benefits to vulnerable populations and allows states, who are willing, to promote developmental outcomes and protect the environment. But neither the political conditions in Colombia nor the terms of the Canada-Colombia FTA provide these reassurances. Indeed, while Canadians were promised that this agreement had been tailored to take account of human rights concerns, in fact the agreement turns out to be a standard “market-access” oriented trade deal, with ineffectual side agreements on labour and the environment.

Colombian civil society and human rights organizations have been clear: they do not want this agreement.

Ratification of this deal provides Canadian political support to a regime in Colombia that is deeply implicated in gross violations of human rights and immersed in a spiralling political scandal for links to paramilitary death squads. Canada’s own process is marked by secrecy and a disregard for the deliberations of parliament...

The FTA will hit small-scale farmers with low-price competition, and may further expose indigenous people, Afro-Colombians and rural dwellers to land grabs by

Canadian mining companies equipped with powerful new investor rights, but no binding responsibilities.

In their executive summary conclusion, they state:

In 2008, the Standing Committee on International Trade (CIIT) concluded that the FTA with Colombia should not proceed without further improvements in the human rights situation in Colombia and without a comprehensive and independent human rights impact assessment (HRIA). It also called for legislated provisions on corporate social responsibility to address the implementation of universal human rights standards by Canadian entities investing in Colombia.

What we have heard so far in the House, particularly from the Liberals, is that we should go ahead with this agreement and trust that human rights will happen as a result of it. This is despite the fact that the Standing Committee on International Trade recommended that there be a human rights assessment. I would argue that that human rights assessment needs to be done in advance of signing any agreement, because we know what happens when there are signed agreements. There are often very few enforcement mechanisms in place to ensure that those kinds of side agreements, whether they are about human rights, environment or agriculture, are actually implemented and enforced.

I want to touch on a couple of key areas of the agreement. It is stated in “Making a Bad Situation Worse”:

Substantive labour rights protections remain in a side agreement rather than in the body of the agreement. Enforcement of these rights is entirely at the discretion of the signatory governments.

Unlike the provisions for investors’ rights, the agreement offers no trade sanctions, such as the imposition of countervailing duties or the abrogation of preferential trade status, in the event that a Party fails to adhere to the labour rights provisions.

The CCFTA investment chapter pays mere lip service to corporate social responsibility, with “best-efforts” provisions, which are purely voluntary and completely unenforceable.

● (1650)

We have heard members in this House say that somehow these trade agreements are going to make everything fine, yet we know that the enforcement and compliance provisions are very weak. Why would we trust that the side agreements would actually be implemented?

In the document, “Background to the Canada-Colombia Trade Agreement”, there is a chapter titled, “A Human Rights Crisis—Crimes Against Humanity”. It states that independent Colombian and international human rights organizations are unequivocal that human rights violations in Colombia remain rampant. In the last few years, some numbers have gone down, for example kidnappings, while others have gone up, for example, extrajudicial executions, forced displacements and disappearances. There was a sharp rise in killings of trade unionists in 2008, last year. Overall the level of impunity in violations is egregiously high.

A number of independent bodies have examined what is happening in Colombia. International human rights organizations and Colombian human rights organizations talk about the continuing egregious violations of human rights, yet we are being asked to support this agreement in principle.

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We have talked about corporate social responsibility. There have been private members' bills that have asked the House to implement corporate social responsibility internationally. It is stated in the document:

The investment chapter pays mere lip service to corporate social responsibility. Article 816 observes that each party "should encourage enterprises operating within its territory or subject to its jurisdiction to voluntarily incorporate internationally recognized standards of corporate social responsibility in their internal policies." This is a "best efforts" provision—purely voluntary and completely unenforceable. Similar ineffectual language on corporate social responsibility is also found in the agreement's preamble.

Once again we have voluntary provisions, unenforceable best efforts. That simply is not good enough. If Canada is signing on to free trade agreements, we need to ensure that, as we talk about fair trade, we are not in a race to the bottom, but that we are looking at environmental, social and human rights standards that we would like to see across the board. Simply putting in place non-enforceable voluntary provisions is not good enough.

I want to touch for one moment on the report, "Forever Solidarity: A public sector trade union report on Colombia union report on Colombia". In 2008 a number of trade union leaders went to Colombia for an up-close look at what was going on. I want to focus for one moment on the indigenous aspects of this.

We have been asked to trust that the Conservatives would negotiate an agreement that would take into consideration human rights. I want to turn for one moment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Conservative government refused to have Canada sign on to this declaration. There are many articles that would directly apply to indigenous people in Colombia, but I want to reference article 18, which states:

Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision making institutions.

Elsewhere in the declaration it talks about free prior and informed consent.

The Conservative government refused to sign on to the UN declaration. We know that there are gross human rights violations in Colombia against indigenous people. We are supposed to accept in good faith that the Conservative government, which does not support that UN declaration, will work toward making sure human rights are implemented through a free trade agreement.

This is what the trade union leaders found with respect to indigenous people:

We met with the poorest of the poor families displaced from their homes by paramilitary groups to benefit transnational companies, some of them Canadian, wanting to expand agriculture production, mining and other business interests. We were told that more than 4 million people, 10 per cent of the population, have been displaced without reparations.

We sat with single mothers and grandmothers who have no drinkable water, no sewage, no electricity, little money for food, and no chance of their children ever going to school. These citizens, largely from rural areas, must beg for a living on city streets.

● (1655)

The Permanent Peoples' Tribunal had two years of hearings, in six sectors of the Colombian economy, including the public sector, and

it came out with a report. This is some of what that report talked about:

In the extraordinary case of indigenous peoples, the report cited widespread acts of cultural and community genocide. Twenty-eight indigenous groups are in "imminent danger of physical and cultural extinction" and 18 of the communities have less than ten members. They "are suspended between life and death." The report went on to cite a horrifying list of human and labour rights abuses that is shocking the world.

Under the "indigenous peoples described displacement process", in the same report, the president of the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia described the struggle of indigenous peoples in the Colombia socio-political context. "Neither pro-government nor pro-guerilla", he asserted the claims of indigenous people to their ancestral land and their right to development. It goes on to talk about the fact that indigenous peoples have been chased away from their lands by the colonizers and that they have been fighting for their survival ever since.

Nowadays, there is a speeding up of the process. The indigenous peoples constitute 4% of the population but 8% of the displaced people. Every means are used to expel them: pressures, threats and murder. It is clear that neo-colonialism is firmly entrenched in Colombia.

The labour leaders heard presentations about the relation between transnational corporations and the displacement of indigenous groups. The Uribe government is handing over protected lands and parks to the international tourist trade to set up so-called eco-tourist sites, causing wide displacement of aboriginal peoples.

I could go on. This report has case after case of indigenous peoples being displaced from their lands. There has been no compensation, no consultation, no consideration of the protection of their culture, language and rights.

We are expected to believe that this free trade agreement is going to be good for the human rights of people in Colombia, for the residents of Colombia and the indigenous peoples of Colombia. Why would we trust that when the current Conservative government refused to sign on to the UN declaration of indigenous rights? I would argue that based on much of the information we have seen, there is no reason to trust that human rights will be protected or enhanced under this free trade agreement.

I want to briefly touch on more of the track record of human rights. I touched on the indigenous issue. I want to talk about the *falsos positivos*, that is, the false-positives. These are cases reported by units of the armed forces as positive results in their action against illegal armed groups that are reported in official reports as deaths under combat of insurgent actors and by other legitimate actions, according to the IHL. Later, given the denouncements of social organizations and human rights defenders, direct victims or their families, or by the local and international media, they have been revealed to be actions against non-combatant civilian populations, constituting serious violations against human rights and international human law.

*Government Orders*

The actions tracked by our databank have three main motives: political persecution, social intolerance, and abuse or excessive authority. The specific modalities of victimization in which our database categorizes human rights violations are, among others, extrajudicial executions, intentional homicide of protected persons, torture, injuries, individual or collective threats, disappearances and use of civilians as human shields.

This is a report that comes from the Center for Popular Research, Education and Policy. It is a special report on the balance of the second semester of 2008, and it was issued in April 2009. This report implies a decrease in 149 cases that occurred in 2007, but an increase in relationship to the 68 cases registered in 2006. It goes on to say that “according to denouncements made by families of victims and social organizations, the degree of influence that the official forces have had in these crimes against humanity seriously undermines the legitimacy of the military and police forces across the country”.

It goes on to talk about the fact that the military and police forces are complicit in misrepresenting the data about disappearances, about murders. These are well-documented cases.

● (1700)

I want to quickly refer to one other report called “Baseless Prosecutions of Human Rights Defenders in Colombia: In the Dock and Under the Gun”. This report has page after page of cases where people have been arrested or detained and then cites that either the judiciary, the police or the armed forces were simply wrong in what they had done.

I want to quote a case. This was in 2008. The president of the Permanent Committee of Human Rights was detained along with 15 other union and social leaders. They were detained by the National Police and a number of other forces. The signs of defects in the investigation cited that this person's detention, Sandoval, appeared related to his human rights advocacy, because he criticized the government's human rights record, especially on such issues as arbitrary detention, forced displacement and extrajudicial executions.

That is just one case. There are many more. I want to talk about a couple of the defects in the investigations because it shows how widespread and serious they are. We have heard members in this House talk about the fact that things are getting better, but this was in 2008.

We had other cases, in 2007, where the report says, “recklessly and with bad faith in trying to lead the proceedings, disrespecting her authority”. They were talking about the tribunal in this case. They went on to dismiss the complaints.

In another case, the former president of the Association of Displaced People, it said, “the only evidence against him was reintegrated witness testimony, which alleged that Torres gave information to the guerrilla resulting in the death of two people”. However, one of the people who supposedly died subsequently came forward to testify. Unless one can do that from the grave, I am sure we have a case of manipulated witness testimony.

I want to talk about other signs of defects in investigations. This was from members of the Civilian Community for Life and Peace, a group of displaced citizens working to reclaim their land without intervention by members of the armed conflict. They were arrested

in 2006. They were detained after there was wiretapping to start an investigation for kidnapping. The person arrested was found innocent because the judge found that evidence was insufficient and that Perdomo had merely provided personal gifts to her sister, which did not constitute criminal activity. Furthermore, the judge questioned the credibility and expertise of the author of the intelligence report.

A lawyer and professor at the university was arrested in 2006 for the crime of rebellion, but it was allegedly rescinded before being executed. When they looked at the investigation, they found the prosecution did not notify Ramirez of the ongoing investigation against him until his arrest. The existence of the investigation was allegedly denied by judicial authorities in meetings with the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights.

I could go on and on about the human rights violations, about the improper and inadequate investigations, about the plight of indigenous people in Colombia. Over the last 20 minutes, I have talked about the egregious human rights violations that continue in Colombia to this very day.

Canada has an opportunity, if we are interested in pursuing some sort of trade agreement with Colombia, to talk up front about the human rights piece that needs to be in place to protect people in Colombia from disappearances, from kidnappings, from murder.

Canada often touts itself on the international stage as being a proud defender of human rights. This is an example where we could use some of that Canadian pride in human rights to insist that when we look at an agreement we make sure human rights are enshrined.

Therefore, I want to move an amendment to the amendment.

I move:

That the amendment be further amended by inserting after the word “matter” the following “, including having heard vocal opposition to the accord from human rights organizations”.

● (1705)

**The Deputy Speaker:** The subamendment is in order, so we will move on to questions and comments.

The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan. She is always extremely effective in the House, and it was no different today. She comes from British Columbia, which has had a lot of problems, as she is well aware, of murderous thugs in drug trafficking gangs. I would like her to comment.

The Uribe regime has been linked to murderous thugs in drug trafficking gangs in Colombia, yet B.C. Conservatives are joining Conservatives from elsewhere in the country to hang a medal on these folks.

*Government Orders*

In declassified documents that were available a few years ago, the Defense Intelligence Agency in the United States described President Uribe in the following way. He was described as one of the most important Colombian narco-traffickers and that he is a Colombian politician dedicated to collaboration with the Medellín Cartel at high government levels. This is the drug trafficking cartel that has provided a very lucrative trade in hard drugs across North America. He is further described as a close personal friend of Pablo Escobar, who is one of the most notorious drug traffickers.

We have a direct tie with President Uribe, and there is much more evidence to come, yet B.C. Conservatives are saying it is okay. They can murder people and deal drugs and the Conservatives will cut a ribbon and sign a free trade agreement with them. How does the member think people in British Columbia are going to react when they find out?

• (1710)

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, I want to reference a story in the *Washington Post* on May 17. The headline is “Scandals Surround Colombian Leader Top Aides Suspected in Secret Police Case”. The article states:

For weeks after the news broke, Colombians knew only that the secret police had spied on Supreme Court judges, opposition politicians, activists and journalists. Suspicions swirled that the orders for the wiretapping, as well as general surveillance, had come from the presidential palace.

Then on Friday, the inspector general's office announced an investigation against three of President Álvaro Uribe's closest advisers and three former officials of the Department of Administrative Security, or DAS, the intelligence service that answers to the president. Inspector General Alejandro Ordoñez investigates malfeasance in government agencies, and his findings can be used in criminal prosecutions.

The latest revelations have come on top of an influence-peddling scandal involving the president's two sons...

This is from the *Washington Post*. I assume that it did its homework.

Our government is attempting to align us with a regime that has serious corruption problems. In terms of the other testimony from people living in the country about the murders, kidnappings and disappearances, I have to question why we would expect the Conservative government to lead us into this kind of trade affiliation. We need to use this as a lever prior to signing any agreement. We need to look at the human rights record and enforceable provisions. An independent human rights assessment is one of the things that industry and trade committee called for.

I would argue that we need to look at trade agreements that enshrine human rights with enforceable mechanisms.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my hon. colleague's speech, which I found very interesting.

Like her, no doubt, I have many Colombian political refugees in my riding of Drummond. These people were beaten and sentenced to death. Most come here suffering horrible after-effects. They were tortured, shot in the face and so on. I would not say I see them every day in my office, but several times a year, I see serious cases.

We often hear the government on the other side talk about law and order. It seems that they always use those words to describe what they would like to do in Canada.

I want to ask my colleague a question. Does she not think that when it comes to other countries, instead of talking about law and order here in the House, the government could be quicker to get involved and try to address problems?

[*English*]

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, sadly, far too many members of the House have had dealings with Colombians who have had to flee their country. I know of a heartbreaking case where one of my constituents simply did not know if his family was still alive. It took many weeks to get some communication to find out that the family was alive, although one of the family members had been detained. We were fortunate in this case that the family was able to come to Canada.

I know there are many cases where family members are not reunited. We encourage those kinds of human rights. We are well placed on the international stage to talk about human rights but this kind of agreement does not support that.

We are talking about negotiating with a government that is under siege by people in its own country because of its alleged corrupt practices and alleged involvement in interfering in a process with opposition politicians and supreme court judges. I wonder what it is that is pushing the Conservatives into pursuing an agreement that clearly has other members, like the United States, backing away from it.

• (1715)

**Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is always great to hear the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan talk about issues that are so important to our country and our communities.

My city of Sudbury is well-known for its activism with trade unionists. According to the International Labour Organization, over the last 10 years 60% of all trade unionists murdered in the world were in Colombia. That is so unfortunate and I am sure the people in Sudbury would be up in arms to know that we are even considering this type of trade agreement.

I looked at the travel advisories that the government puts out in relation to Colombia. We have been hearing how great things are in Colombia and how things are turning around. However, in looking at the website, it says that people should avoid all unnecessary travel to an area that is killing its own citizens for issues that are basic human rights. How can the government say that it wants to trade with a place that we do not even want to send our own citizens to? It seems hypocritical in some sense and I would like to hear your comments on that.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I would like to remind the hon. member for Sudbury to address comments through the Chair and not directly to other members.

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.



*Government Orders*

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, the member for Sudbury raises a very good point around the fact that the Canada government is encouraging Canadians not to travel to Colombia. That says something about what is happening in the country.

However, I want to come back to the labour issue for a moment. The substantive labour rights protection remains in a side agreement and the enforcement of these rights is entirely at the discretion of the signatory government. The Conservative government is prepared to sign a free trade agreement that sidelines labour rights. It puts them in a side agreement that is not enforceable. I am not sure what that says about our commitment to workers' rights, both in this country and internationally.

The member for Sudbury raises a very valid issue. We know that the trade union movement in Canada has been very active in trying to raise awareness around what is happening in Colombia. In the report, "Making a Bad Situation Worse", prepared partly by the Canadian Labour Congress but also with other partners, the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, the Canadian Association of Labour Lawyers and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

The labour movement in Canada has been working quite closely with the trade union movement in Colombia to attempt to highlight the egregious human rights violations that are happening in Colombia. I would urge members of the House to vote no to this free trade agreement with Colombia.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise today on Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia.

People might be inclined to think that the purpose of this agreement is basically to facilitate trade between Canada and Colombia. As with all trade accords, it should have been signed first and foremost for the purposes of trade. The fact of the matter is though—and I will explain why a little later—this agreement is intended more to protect big Canadian mining companies and shield them in various ways.

Discussions were started in 2002 with various Latin American and Andean countries: Peru, Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia. It was not just yesterday, therefore, that the negotiations were undertaken with these countries to facilitate trade and sign a free trade agreement. Canada recently decided to focus on two of the countries, Peru and Colombia. More formal discussions were held, leading to negotiations in 2007 with these two countries. On November 21, 2008 the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement was finally signed.

As I was saying, people might think that Canada signed this agreement in order to reduce tariffs and facilitate trade between our two countries. If we look a bit more closely, though, at the wording of the agreement, we soon realize that it is intended more to protect big multinationals and ensure they can continue to make profits while disregarding the basic rules of democratic societies, such as human rights, workers' rights, and the protection of the environment.

First of all, the agreement contains a chapter on protecting investment that is basically intended to facilitate the lives of Canadians who invest in Colombia, especially in the mining sector. This finds concrete expression in the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia.

We should remember that the so-called mining codes were overhauled more than 10 years ago in order to give a lot of tax and regulatory breaks to the foreign companies that came and set up operations in developing countries. That was all funded several years ago by various international organizations, including CIDA and the World Bank. So Canada did not wait until 2008 to give tax breaks to its companies. It used its international tentacles—the World Bank but CIDA as well—to finance the changes to the codes and therefore to the laws that these countries were passing.

Whether in Africa or Colombia, Canadian tax dollars were used to help revise their domestic legislation, reduce environmental protections, and provide major tax breaks to the companies that came to explore for and exploit the mines.

The Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia has one major advantage therefore: it facilitates the lives of Canadian investors who decide to put their money into the Colombian mining sector.

• (1720)

The most regrettable aspect of this agreement is the fact that the chapter on investment protection is drawn right from chapter 11 of the North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA, which aims to protect major investors and enables them to circumvent legislation approved by parliaments to protect workers and the environment. This is what is wrong with this agreement. It does not aim to improve trade between two countries, but rather to protect investors and multinationals. It gives them the right to take to court governments that have decided to introduce environmental legislation or laws to protect workers. That is unacceptable.

The Bloc has always advocated promoting international trade agreements to facilitate trade between countries, but never to the detriment of workers' rights, environmental protection or human rights.

However, this is not what this government has done. It should have drawn on certain chapters in the Canada-U.S. free trade agreement, the FTA, such as chapter 16, which did two or three things while protecting investments.

First off, this chapter provided for the creation of a dispute resolution mechanism. We have seen the results. No case has gone to an arbitration tribunal. Chapter 16 of the FTA, which the government might have drawn on in the agreement between Canada and Colombia, is not included. However, this chapter of the FTA led to a 41% increase in Canadian investment in the United States. This shows that there is a way to protect investments while providing guarantees in international trade agreements.

### *Government Orders*

The government, in Bill C-23 and the agreement between Canada and Colombia, decided instead to draw right from chapter 11 of NAFTA. It did so in order to take advantage of Colombia's unimaginable resources. The mining and energy resources are considerable and include gold, nickel and coal. Thirty-one per cent of our imports from Colombia come from natural and energy resources. So the government tried to extract resources from a country with a unstable social situation in order to enrich the multinationals. Nothing is more irresponsible in social terms at a time when corporate social responsibility is increasingly a topic of discussion.

This agreement is unacceptable. Unacceptable too is the government's use of chapter 11, which among other things provides that, when legislation cuts into investors' profits, the government of this country is at risk of being sued. So, environmental and worker protection are scaled down. The constant violation of human rights is condoned. In the case of Colombia, the government is supporting the argument that paramilitaries or organized groups can be in collusion with a government that exploits rural populations where natural resources are found.

As a political party, we cannot accept this. And it is one reason we oppose this agreement. We oppose this agreement, which socially destabilizes a people already socially destabilized.

• (1725)

In 2006, 47% of the population was under the poverty line and 12% of the population and 68% of that poverty were found in rural areas. Why is it so important to talk about poverty in rural areas? It is because that is where the natural resources are and where Canadian companies, particularly mining companies, will go. Poverty is endemic in rural areas. Organized groups expropriate land and drive out local people, who have tried many times to get guarantees when the mining code was amended. We are now telling Canadian companies to go there and that we will condone bad social behaviour. That increases poverty, violence, and inequalities when here, in this House, we should talk about responsible and fair trade. We must conclude that the government does not understand what fair trade means.

Human rights are fundamental. We must remember that in July of 2007, the Prime Minister visited Latin America. Just before he left, unions, the CLC and Amnesty International too, clearly asked him not to forget that an agreement was under negotiation between Canada and Colombia and that he should not sign it if that agreement lead to an erosion of human rights. The Prime Minister went there nonetheless. He ignored the demands of workers and groups that work in developing countries. He decided nonetheless to visit Latin America and later, in 2008, he decided to sign the agreement that in the end will penalize the most destitute peoples, who are also victims of violence.

As we know, in 2008, crimes were committed by paramilitary groups, the ones I was talking about, which were in collusion with the government in place, those that pushed, forced and threatened rural populations to leave their traditional homelands to make way for the development, exploration and extraction of natural resources. In 1988, the crimes committed against such populations by paramilitary groups rose to 41% from 14% the previous year.

Earlier, the hon. member for Davenport said that the situation had changed in Colombia, that that was no longer the case, that there was no longer any violence, that everything was fine and the situation has improved. In one year, the crimes committed by paramilitary groups increased to 41%, from just 14% the previous year. How is that an improvement? More violence, more human rights violations. Worse still, the rights of workers are increasingly being affected.

Since 1991, over 2,000 union leaders have been killed. Some 90% of all union leaders in the world who are assassinated are killed in Colombia. The Liberal member for Davenport tells us that the situation has improved, that everything is fine and that we should take this agreement, and study it in committee and sub-committee. I think the numbers speak for themselves. We do not need to go to Colombia, as my colleague has said, to see that human rights are being violated. There is no need to study this agreement any further. We have seen the proof: these human rights violations, workers' rights violations and violations of environmental laws are taking place in Colombia.

• (1730)

These mining advantages are significant, since, as I said, the mining code has been reformed in recent years. What purpose did those reforms serve? Basically, the reforms were meant to create more favourable conditions for mining companies.

The legislation from 1991 was looked at and revised in order to improve conditions for Canadian companies so they could go to those countries in order to explore for and exploit nickel, coal and gold deposits, all at the expense of rural populations. Canadian taxpayers' money was used. The Colombian government received assistance through CIDA and the World Bank. It was given money to help change its environmental legislation in order to be more accommodating and more favourable for mining companies.

How? First of all, the legislation was revised, making it possible to grant a mining company a single permit to allow for both exploration for and exploitation of a mineral deposit. Second, mining companies were giving a timeline of 50 years and that timeline is even renewable. How was that done? I urge the members to read a very interesting case study completed by the Halifax Initiative. It states:

Through its Energy, Mining and Environmental Project, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) provided technical and financial support to redraft Colombian mining legislation. The revised 2001 Mining Code..., which was adopted without consulting with potentially-affected indigenous communities, created investment conditions that are extremely favourable to foreign companies. The Code weakened a number of existing environmental and social safeguards and created significant financial incentives including dramatically reduced mining royalty and tax rates.

Indigenous groups in Colombia argue that the lack of consultation on this new legislation contravened International Labour Organization Convention 169, which was ratified by Colombia and formally adopted into national legislation in 1991. They argue that the Code places limitations on the concept of indigenous territory that violate the Colombian Constitution. Moreover, the legislation eliminates prior requirements that local communities receive economic benefits deriving from mining activity.

*Government Orders*

What does this mean? It means that Canada started redrafting legislation and, with public money through CIDA, funded revisions to legislation and mining codes before signing the Canada-Colombia agreement.

Now, after amending the legislation, they have created fiscal and regulatory benefits for the mining companies in place by making sure that, I repeat, “the legislation eliminates prior requirements that local communities receive economic benefits deriving from mining activity”.

Local communities and indigenous peoples are having their land expropriated and are being told that they cannot receive royalties for mining activity. The government changed the codes and regulations using public money and, to top it all off, signed a Canada-Colombia agreement to protect investors and even enable them to go to court and challenge regulatory amendments that would protect the environment, human rights and workers.

The Canadian government quite simply conspired with the mining companies to create an iron-clad system at the expense of the local people.

• (1735)

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I found the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie's remarks on the agreement very interesting. It looks as though the Conservatives and the Liberals can no longer defend their positions on this issue because they have not risen in the House to defend themselves in quite some time. I hope that they are giving the matter some serious thought and that they are beginning to understand what saying yes to this blood-stained regime would mean.

The member is familiar with the motorcycle gang and drug dealer problems in Quebec. The Colombian regime has very close connections with drug dealers, drug lords, and people who kill other innocent people, such as opposition party members, human rights organization members, and union members.

How would the people of Quebec react to seeing the Conservatives and the Liberals go ahead with an agreement with such a blood-stained regime?

• (1740)

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** Mr. Speaker, as my colleague knows, Quebec is a progressive nation. Clearly, Quebecers will not stand for the Canadian government signing an agreement that could undermine human rights and workers' rights.

I want to point out to both the House and the people of this country that even though the Conservative government signed the agreement, the mining code, which was amended to benefit those investing in mining, was ratified and supported by the Liberal Party. It is as though the Liberal Party started the job and the Conservatives finished it. That is why the member for Davenport hesitated, expressed uncertainty, and had no clear position. It is pretty obvious. In this case, the Liberals started the job, and the Conservatives finished it. They are all cut from the same cloth.

**Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague is right in saying that it is all the same and that these two parties have concocted it, if you will. My colleague for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie gave a brilliant speech on the specifics of this bill.

My colleague knows perfectly well that in developing countries such as Colombia, where the people are poor but the country is rich, the only way for the people to have real power and development is through their government institutions, their government and the people they elect.

By signing the free trade agreement with Colombia, by including a provision similar to NAFTA's chapter 11—which gives real power not to the people, not to the government institutions, not to the public representatives but first and foremost to investors—and by allowing investors to go back to the government at any time to obtain financial compensation, the Canadian government will weaken the government in power to such an extent that we can truly speak of exploitation and colonization.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that.

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague is quite right. The power of governments must not be eroded, especially by trade agreements. We must ensure that governments have complete freedom of movement in order to pass legislation. That is the problem with chapter 11. But some Liberals and Conservatives will say that side deals on the environment have been signed that, they believe, supposedly have as much weight as the trade clauses of NAFTA. That is nonsense.

We must guarantee that governments will be able to introduce legislation and regulations when they believe that the well-being of their people is at risk. In this case, we must ensure, as I mentioned earlier, that the Colombian government will have guarantees and that it will be able to enact labour and environmental legislation. That is not necessarily the case with this agreement because it allows major multinationals to challenge future labour and environmental regulations in court.

**Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the speeches given by my colleagues from Quebec and British Columbia. I agree: we must consider the well-being of the people of Colombia. There is no question.

As a lawyer, I received a letter from a lawyer from Colombia a few years ago. He said he was afraid of appearing in court and that it was dangerous because of the inequalities, problems and conflicts in Colombia.

I have a question for my colleague from Quebec. What should we do? If we do not make a commitment to the people of another country, we will not have the opportunity to improve the situation. I know there have been many improvements in Colombia.

• (1745)

[*English*]

Between 2002 and 2008, kidnappings have decreased by 87% and homicide rates have dropped by 44%.

[*Translation*]

I am convinced that we must look at the situation not through a still camera, but through a video camera. Things are improving and we must encourage the people of Colombia.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** Mr. Speaker, I want to be perfectly clear. We are not against international trade agreements. We are not against globalization.

But when we sign international agreements on human rights and International Labour Organization conventions, international trade agreements should take them into account.

The same is true of the environment. We have nothing against the free trade agreement between Canada and the United States or other countries, but we must take into consideration the international protocols we have ratified, such as the Kyoto protocol. Conventions on biosafety have been signed, and other agreements have been signed at the International Labour Organization. When we sign trade agreements with other countries, we have to recognize the value of these conventions with respect to the environment, human rights and labour rights.

Otherwise, what happens? We sign international agreements, such as the convention on the rights of the child, that carry less weight than trade agreements, including the one between Canada and Colombia. We need to ensure that these agreements that have been signed with a view to protecting our children, the environment and workers' rights not only can have a benefit, but are at least as valuable as the trade agreements being signed.

The problem at present is that even though the biosafety protocol and the Kyoto protocol exist, these international protocols do not carry any weight with the courts when a complaint is filed with the WTO, for example.

[English]

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia.

I have a number of people who are concerned about this agreement, therefore I think a bit of historical information is important.

A year ago the House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade tabled its report on the free trade agreement with Colombia. Out of respect for Parliament, the government ought to have responded to this. Concerns were expressed by the Standing Committee on International Trade, specifically the recommendation which asked for an independent comprehensive rights impact assessment. I believe a full independent human rights assessment, as recommended by the committee, should be provided by the government to Parliament before we vote on Bill C-23.

Colombia has faced years of internal conflict, where violence and human rights abuses have been perpetrated by paramilitary groups in the ongoing battles between the paramilitary and the gorilla organizations. These battles have been funded largely by the narco-economy, that is drug money.

In the last several years the Colombian government has made significant progress under President Uribe towards achieving security for the Colombian people. There have been significant reductions in violence and human rights abuses. The general murder rate has fallen dramatically and the International Crisis Group has

noted, "since 2003 Colombia has witnessed a substantial decline in violence and kidnappings".

This increase in security has helped pave the way for a stronger Colombian economy. From 2002 to 2007, the Colombian economy has grown an average of 5.3% per annum. However, we know there are still significant problems in Colombia, for example, violence and its root causes, poverty, the paramilitary groups and the illicit drug trade still remain.

It is a problem that in our trade and our aid policy with Colombia, Canada has a responsibility to engage and to work in partnership with the Colombian government to address these issues.

The recent economic progress that Colombia has achieved has been impressive in many ways, but it is incomplete and fragile. It is fragile for the basic reason that it still relies heavily on narco-economy. If Colombia is to achieve sustainable progress in human rights, it must expand its legitimate economy. A strong legitimate economy is required to fund social infrastructure, which will help to address the root causes of violence and to wean the Colombian people off the narco-economy.

Advancements in institutional building must carry on, whether at the political, judicial or administrative levels. On this front, concerns have been expressed regarding the suggestion that President Uribe may seek a constitutional amendment to secure an unprecedented third consecutive term as president.

In its May 14 issue, *The Economist* magazine ran an article entitled "Uribe edges towards autocracy". The opponents of the third term extension argue that checks and balances in the constitution are designed for a four year presidential term and that an erosion of the separation of powers under Mr. Uribe would be aggravated by a third term.

• (1750)

The same article also recognizes President Uribe's accomplishments in the past, including the fact that, "Many Colombians credit Mr. Uribe with transforming their homeland from a near-failed state to a buoyant, if still violent, place". The magazine concludes that, "If he doesn't quit while he is still ahead, history may judge that Mr. Uribe began to undo his own achievement".

It is important to ensure that there be no erosion in the progress that has been made so far, that there be no constitutional amendment. Respect for the constitution is paramount for any democratic state.

There has been progress made. There has been movement to demobilize the paramilitary, the economy has improved and people are themselves stating that President Uribe has transformed Colombia from a near failed state to a buoyant place, though not as non-violent as they would have expected.

As we move forward with Bill C-23, we should ensure we emphasize that this free trade agreement helps improve the living standards of the poor, particularly in the rural areas. To ensure lasting progress, Colombia must ensure that its economic opportunities and jobs are there for impoverished Colombians. If it does not happen, then the only jobs they might get are through the narco-economy or paramilitary. We have seen classic examples of this in Afghanistan.

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To help the legal economy grow, we need to think of a broader range and a free trade agreement is an important aspect. Trade and investment and the right free trade agreement could help the people of Colombia diversify and strengthen its economy and society.

If we look at Canada's involvement in Afghanistan, for example, we have realized that development is one way of getting that economy out of its dependency on the poppy trade and the Taliban. Two-way Canada-Colombia merchandise trade in 2008 was valued at \$1.35 billion. Approximately half of it was exports.

Canada and Colombia are not exactly each other's biggest trading partners. However, by putting in place a free trade agreement with Colombia, one has strong investment protection measures. A free trade agreement could act as an international signal that Colombia could attract and leverage legitimate foreign investment from all over the world. Therefore, it is a significant agreement to the people of Colombia and it is important that we send the right signals.

Increased international economic engagement with Colombia and the potential for increased political pressure that comes with it could have the capacity, with the right free trade agreement, to incentivize the Colombian government to pursue further reforms in support of increased security, human rights and economic growth. In other words, the right free trade agreement can help the Colombian government promote peace, stability and the rule of law.

As we discuss the ratification of this free trade agreement, we should recognize what role Parliament plays and what is not in the terms of trade agreements. It is our responsibility as parliamentarians to determine whether Bill C-23 in fact represents a solid, sound free trade agreement. Does this agreement adequately address the legitimate concerns of Canadians regarding human rights abuses, labour laws and environmental standards? Are these measures relative to the side agreements on labour and the environment robust enough?

• (1755)

We know, for example, that the labour co-operation agreement requires that each country protect its right of freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, the abolition of child labour, the elimination of forced or compulsory labour, and the elimination of discrimination. We know that this agreement includes a complaint and dispute resolution process.

Would this process be legitimate and accountable? Those are the types of questions that we need to consider as a Parliament.

The government states that this process would, for example, allow a member of the public to file a complaint or request an investigation if Canada or Colombia failed to or was purported to have failed to live up to the agreement. Furthermore, the agreement would create an independent review panel that could impose fines on the offending country of up to \$15 million.

The question we need to ask is this. Are these provisions sufficient? We need to as parliamentarians review and thoroughly analyze this.

As we study the legislation, we ask to call before committee recognized experts in these fields in order to evaluate the

effectiveness of the labour and environmental provisions in this free trade agreement and its side agreements.

The Government of Canada, not the Parliament of Canada, negotiates trade agreements. The Government of Canada, not the Parliament of Canada, has negotiated this specific free trade agreement. It is not the role of parliamentarians to sit down with other countries to negotiate the free trade agreements. Trade negotiations are a function of the government and our public officials, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

However, our job as parliamentarians is to carefully consider the trade agreements before us and to determine whether or not they are in our national interest and whether or not the trade agreement, as written, reflects our values.

Therefore, the questions to ask are these. Is the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, as the government has presented, which we are considering through Bill C-23, in Canada's best interest? Does it reflect our shared values, particularly in the areas of human rights? Will it achieve greater peace, prosperity and security for Colombians? Will it help us, as Canadians, partner with the Colombian people to develop and build their economy?

The U.S., our largest trading partner, has yet to ratify its free trade agreement with Colombia. It may in fact seek a renegotiation. The Obama administration has indicated an openness to a free trade agreement with Colombia but that may require a renegotiation and more robust agreements on labour and the environment.

How would this impact our position vis-à-vis Colombia and the U.S.? Should this affect the timing of our consideration of Bill C-23? These are the questions that must guide our deliberations during the debate today.

The Conservative government has still not formally responded to the report of June 2008, a year ago, of the House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade. It is important that the government respond to the recommendations of the standing committee's report before it expects Parliament to vote on this out of respect for all parliamentarians.

The issue of violence in Colombia merits special attention and the resources available to the international trade committee ought to consider and assess the expected impact of this free trade agreement on the human rights situation in Colombia.

Proponents say that it would help, that in fact weaning the Colombian people off the narcotic economy with real economic opportunities is essential to moving forward. Some of the opponents, including some of the human rights organizations, say it will not help. In fact, it would make the situation worse.

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• (1800)

We have a responsibility to drill down on the facts and to not be guided by ideology, either the ideology that free trade at all costs is the word of the day or the position sometimes taken by others that every free trade agreement is bad. We have to be guided not by ideology but by the real concerns expressed to us by the human rights community, the labour movement and others, and the concerns and support from people such as the agriculture and business communities, who see this as being an important opportunity for Canada.

Given recent developments, it would be important for the Standing Committee on International Trade to perhaps go to Colombia and see the situation on the ground firsthand, meet with the Colombian government and have these discussions. We need to have clearer discussions regarding the constitutional amendments. As parliamentarians, we must be able to satisfy that this free trade agreement and its side agreements will enable and not hinder progress on human rights, labour rights and the environment before we can support its ratification and send this legislation to the other place.

As we proceed with our deliberations, we must be very careful not to confound the issues of commercial trade with development aid. As parliamentarians, we must be clear that pursuing free trade with Colombia does not reduce the Government of Canada's responsibility to provide development aid to that country. We have to continue through CIDA to invest in and help the people of Colombia. A combination of trade policy and aid policy is important.

Canada is a country of great freedoms. The citizens are protected by laws that many governments do not extend. While we strive to protect the individual rights of Canadians at home, our efforts abroad are limited to leading by example. In order for us to engage Colombia on human rights issues, we need to do it through dialogue. Globally, Canada's experience has been that it is through a broader dialogue that human rights can be inculcated in those countries and their civil societies.

We in the Liberal Party have built our foundation on social justice and equality. This ethos is ingrained in our party, the party that is the party of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. As members of Parliament, we must look at these broader terms of engagement before we make our decision.

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, given the comments made by the member for Don Valley East, it is obvious that she is prepared to support our amendment.

When we were in Colombia and the committee was working on the possible free trade agreement, the government practically accepted and endorsed the principle of this agreement. Hence, the committee was not able to complete its work. Even if the member wanted to make changes to the agreement it would not be possible because it has been signed. We are now considering the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act. Therefore, we do not need to refer the implementation bill. We can simply stop the process, have the government go back to the drawing board and

include, in the next revised version, those elements that have led to disagreement in this House with respect to the free trade agreement.

There are parallel agreements but the fact is that they are mutually exclusive. New free trade agreements should cover all aspects of human rights, labour rights and environmental law.

Based on her speech, I presume that the member will support the amendment we have presented today.

[*English*]

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** Mr. Speaker, as I looked at the history behind this trade agreement, I understood that the government did not do its due diligence and did not respond to the recommendations made by the committee, specifically that there be an independent, comprehensive rights impact assessment. I agree with the frustration that is being faced by many members as they look at this agreement because human rights are critical.

Labour movements are quite upset over this issue. However, in order for us to move forward globally, we need to look at what other avenues are available. Countries such as China and India used to have human rights violations. We opened up trade with them. We did it with Mozambique and South Africa. Remember the Frelimo fighters? We need to ensure that we move in a logical direction. I would be willing to look at the amendments before I make any comment on them.

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the problem with the Liberal Party position that somehow this is like trading with South Africa is that in this case it would be like trading with South Africa under the apartheid regime. We are well aware of the criminal nature of the Uribe regime. We know of the evidence and the testimony and every single legitimate, reputable human rights organization in Colombia and Canada have denounced this agreement.

The CCIC said that the agreement makes a bad situation worse. Colombian civil society human rights organizations have all been very clear and so has the leader of the Liberal Party. The leader of the Liberal Party said the Liberals are going to prop up the Conservatives and support this agreement. So, it is disingenuous for Liberals to stand in the House and say that their leader is supporting this agreement with whatever, we do not care about the ramifications for Colombia, we are just going to help the Conservatives ram this through, and then have Liberal members try to pretend that they have not made that decision.

Can the member confirm that the leader of the Liberal Party said very clearly that he is propping up the Conservatives and supporting this agreement?

• (1810)

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** Mr. Speaker, as far as I know, President Uribe was democratically elected and I do not interfere in that country's democracy and the way it chooses its president.

*Government Orders*

When I do a comparison of the narco-economics and the poppy trade of Afghanistan, and I look at the similarities that are taking place of the reliance of the Afghans on the Taliban, because that is the only way they can get money, it is important that we open up the venue of legitimate trade. Yes, we have problems. This is not a perfect agreement. There are many issues, but we cannot teach human rights to anyone without leading by example. Opening up the door, allowing the Colombians to have dialogue with us on a broader base will slowly but surely address some of the issues.

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member talked about comparing Colombia to other countries where we have seen human rights violations. I believe that the argument can be made that since we engaged in trade, by no means have these human rights violations ended. As Canadians, we should be looking at some of the human rights violations against first nations and people within our own country before we start talking about how our free trade agreement somehow put an end to human rights violations in other countries.

I would like the member to comment on the catastrophically unique situation that Colombia finds itself in. On so many markers of human rights abuse, Colombia ranks number one, number one in terms of the attack on trade unionists, the murders of trade unionists, and the disappearance of trade unionists. And such egregious violations for what? For the right to organize, for the right to stand up and call for fair wages, for equality for workers, something that we take for granted and benefit from here in Canada, and looking to internal displacement. The UNHCR has said on numerous occasions that Colombia ranks extremely high as a country with such a high number of internally displaced refugees.

When we are talking about comparing Colombia to other countries, I would like the member to note some recognition or give some thought to the fact that Colombia is a very different country than the other ones we are dealing with and that is why Canada's position has to be very clear. The Government of Canada cannot allow such human rights abuses to go under the watch of our agreements. We hope that the Liberals will recognize that a stand on human rights means voting against this free trade agreement.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** Mr. Speaker, I am a citizen of the world. I was born in Africa of Indian parentage. I have lived in Britain. I now live in Canada. I think I know the world a lot better and I know where human rights violations are taking place. I know that we have traded with them and it has helped those countries.

The member mentioned the important aspect of the aboriginal communities in Canada, that we have to talk about them before we talk about human rights. It was the member's party that went to bed with the Conservative government and killed the Kelowna accord. The member cannot speak from two sides of her mouth. The member either believes in one thing or she does not.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Mr. Speaker, the member must be aware of the evidence and testimony regarding President Uribe's connections with paramilitaries, his role in the massacres in the Antioquia province and his direct ties with the Medellin drug cartel and Pablo Escobar.

Given all of that evidence and testimony and the fact that the Conservatives seem to think it is okay to do business with people linked with the drug trade and the Medellin cartel, does it not make

the hon. member just a little uneasy to prop up the Conservatives on this issue?

• (1815)

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** Mr. Speaker, I do not believe in wearing blinders or hiding my head in the sand. I also do not believe in hypocrisy. There are governments in the world, powerful governments, that have done exactly what he has described and Colombia is no different.

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, that does not justify the member's course of action nor the course of this House of Commons. Just because evil is propagated against others and that should justify us entering into an agreement where clearly there are significant problems with human rights activity and there is an organized, orchestrated campaign to intimidate those of the citizenry population who want to better their society and have done so in an open and accountable way, which has led to much suffering. Having had a chance to question some of the Colombian delegation at committee, I have not been satisfied with their response.

I mentioned four specific cases of civil liberty union organizers. They were not, for example, from the mines where we would expect some activism or from the farming community where there have been issues with the drug cartels. I mentioned the cases of the school teacher's union, the nursing association and the universities where even in Bogota and other places like that where there is that type of structure, those citizens who had become union organizers to defend the interests of their neighbours, their friends and their families were killed.

The response I got from the people at the Colombian embassy was rather unique. The vast majority of those cases were never brought to trial in Colombia, which they admitted and claimed that they were all crimes of passion. What they meant by crimes of passion was that those individuals were in relationships that somehow did not work out and the spouses, partners or people in their lives had killed them because of that dispute.

I found that response a condemnation of justice. It was a condemnation of a parliamentary committee trying to get to the bare bones of things and investigate things. It is a very dismissive approach that those cases would not be respected. I could not believe that was the response they gave.

However, we need to step back from some of this, from our side here in Canada, and hear from some of the individuals from Colombia. I have an interesting quote from an individual who states:

"If Canada were to assess the real impact of a trade deal on the lives of Colombians, I believe it would change its mind on the advisability of continuing negotiations," says Bishop Juan Alberto Cardona, leader of the Methodist Church of Colombia.

Because the government is using it to justify its approach and to gain credibility in the international community, he goes on to say:

### *Government Orders*

“So, naturally, the government is desperate for a deal with Canada. It’s like a stamp of approval,” says Bishop Cardona. “But we say, stop the killing of innocent Colombians, disarm the paramilitaries, and protect human rights before any deals are made.”

Given the massive investment by the United States government and of Canada through CIDA in other types of trade, which are actually occurring, surely the situation has not gotten to the point where we should just give it a free ride. It is important to note that we are trading with Colombia and were trading with Colombia during a time of record assassinations of its citizens.

What we are saying is that this free trade deal right now is wrong and we need to have that independent analysis that the committee has requested. The reasonable approach here is to ask whether it has been able to bridge the gap successfully to allow these issues to be part of an overall structure and plan, not side deals. Side deals on the environment and on human rights abuses are just that. They show the real fact, which is that they do not matter because if they really mattered they would be in the deal to begin with and they would be conditions to which we could actually hold the government accountable, and we could ensure that those people with whom we are supposed to be growing a relationship will get the natural defence and the rule of law applied to them and their families. Those are the ones we are talking about.

The Methodist bishop from Colombia was quite right when he pointed out that the interests of this deal were really thrust upon an elite group of citizens and the corporate agenda of large corporations that would benefit from it.

● (1820)

The least we can do in this respect is to pursue accountability through our actions. We need the independent assessment report that we are calling for right now and which we have been calling for for over a year.

I do not want to be too hard on my Liberal friends but the Conservatives continue to rub their noses into the ground on this. They have totally dismissed this approach as a reasonable way to come to a resolution here in the House on a Colombia free trade deal. They cannot even provide that element to the Liberal Party and yet the Liberals will support them without having that report completed. This shows the contempt that the Conservatives have for the issue of human rights, which is a priority for Canadians and important for our trading relationship. It is not a hard thing for the government to deliver. The assessment has been validated by a number of organizations, including Amnesty International.

I want to point out that there is some motivation and we saw that today in a press clipping on the Hill entitled, “Colombia may accept beef”. The Minister of Agriculture is pushing hard for Colombia to open its markets. In 2003, Colombia shut down the beef market because of mad cow disease, thereby shutting down Canadian access. The government sees this agreement as a portal to getting beef products back into that country. Interestingly enough, that would not happen until the summer, so Colombia is watching whether or not this deal happens. Maybe the deal is a sell-off for this Parliament.

There is no doubt that we all want trade but there is nothing wrong with following through on the will of Parliament through the committee to have that independent assessment.

The minister talked about a science based approach. If that were the case, then it would have opened the market a long time ago because nothing has changed since 2003 with regard to the science around this issue.

I want to touch on how things really matter in the House of Commons and in committee. Amnesty International pointed out this serious issue in a letter to the Minister of International Trade. I want to read from that letter because it tells us how real this issue is and how we can take either positive action or negative action.

People who came from Colombia to appear before committee put their lives at stake by coming forward but they wanted to make changes for themselves, their families and their communities.

In the letter to the Minister of International Trade dated March 27, 2009, Amnesty International stated:

Ten years ago, Canadian MPs heard compelling testimony about the devastating impact of a hydroelectric project that received US\$18.2 million of Canadian financing assistance from the Export Development Corporation, in support of work on the project by a Canadian corporation. Embera Katio Indigenous leader Kimy Pernia Domico told a Canadian parliamentary hearing that members of his community, whose access to food and to a healthy environment was negatively impacted by construction of the dam, had never been consulted about the project in violation of their rights under the Colombian constitution. Kimy was subsequently disappeared by army-backed paramilitaries. His people continue to live in fear. Other communities do too. Last month, a delegation of human rights defenders from Colombia met with you and testified about the fear generated by the arrival of scores of soldiers in an area of Indigenous opposition to a foreign mining project.

Minister, Canada owes it to the memory of Kimy Pernia Domico, to his family, his community and to all Colombians to ensure that this deal will not exacerbate the already deeply troubling human rights situation in Colombia.

It is important to note that people like Kimy who came forward and testified here in these halls about the issue paid the price for that testimony.

Once again, all we are asking for is an independent assessment on the field.

● (1825)

The interesting thing about this case is it is not just a single one-off; a historic pattern has evolved. The current president, President Uribe, has been part of this problem in many respects, as has been noted by many in the international community.

Back in 2007, Jairo Giraldo, of the national fruit-workers union, and Leonidas Silva Castro, of the teachers union, were murdered in separate incidents. Jairo was part of an organized trade union that had to deal with the land property conflict with the drug trade. We do not know much about the situation involving Leonidas, except that he was murdered at his home. He was a member of the teachers union. That is important to note, because it is not just about those who have conflicts with the drug cartel. There is compelling evidence that connects the Government of Colombia, in the past and in the present, with the cartel and some of the problems they have had with cocaine and other types of commodities.



*Government Orders*

I find it interesting that we would be soft on those individuals yet in our country, the jargon out there is that we are tough on crime. However, it seems that it is okay if it is in somebody else's backyard.

With regard to the teachers union, it is disturbing that union leaders of civil society organizations end up being killed because they represent the workers of those organizations. Nurses associations and others have been affected by that.

Groups and organizations, not just from the Parliament of Canada but also the United States Congress, have travelled to Colombia, and have challenged the Colombian government on these issues. Despite that, there are murders to this day. Last year was a bad year. The pressure has been mounting. According to the February 2008 Reuters news article, "USW Delegation Visits Colombia to Meet Union, Political Leaders", 40 Colombian trade unionists were murdered last year, more than all the union activists killed in all of the countries of the world combined.

It is incredible, in looking at the small geography of Colombia and looking at the other nations of the world where there have been active attacks on trade unionists, that there would be that concentration of murders. We should be talking about the mere fact that Colombia would actually be allowed to have a privileged trade agreement. Let us define this. That is what we are talking about today. We are not talking about ending all trade to Colombia. We are not talking about reducing trade to Colombia. We are not talking about the fact that Canada is trying to increase its trade to Colombia. We are talking about a privileged state of trade that Canada would want to enter into with the Colombian government that has a history of corruption, a number of issues tied to cartels and a number of issues related to killings where the government has not gone after those individuals to any significant success rate. We have not put any type of markers in this trade deal to deal with that.

In fact the issues that have been raised consistently are that of the environment and labour. It is critical to note the environment is also connected to the land conflict uses that could destroy communities and the people who have lived there for generations. They are side agreements.

We are talking about entering into a privileged trade relationship, and we would do so with a country that continues to have that type of record. The Reuters article states:

In the meantime, death threats against trade unionists in Colombia persist, with more than 200 occurring last year, and one union with which the USW works closely in Colombia, Sinaltrainal, received numerous death threats against its leadership last year from the extremely violent "Black Eagles" of the AUC paramilitaries.

Not only are individuals being slaughtered for representing their family members, friends and community members, we also have another series of intimidations. Let us be clear about this. When 40 people, trade unionists, at that point, basically half the year, in Colombia have been killed, we can imagine the level of severity and concern the 200 death threats that were recorded would actually have. These are not small things.

I wrap up—

● (1830)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** I must interrupt the member at this point. He will have five minutes remaining when we return to this matter.

[*Translation*]

**FAMILY HOMES ON RESERVES AND MATRIMONIAL INTERESTS OR RIGHTS ACT**

The House resumed from May 15 consideration of the motion that Bill C-8, An Act respecting family homes situated on First Nation reserves and matrimonial interests or rights in or to structures and lands situated on those reserves, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** It being 6:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the amendment to the motion.

Call in the members.

● (1900)

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(*Division No. 68*)

**YEAS**

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Ashton	Atamanenko
Bagnell	Bains
Bélanger	Bellavance
Bevilacqua	Bevington
Bigras	Blais
Bourgeois	Brison
Byrne	Cannis
Cardin	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Coady	Coderre
Comartin	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Deschamps	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dorion	Dosanjh
Dryden	Duceppe
Dufour	Easter
Eyking	Faille
Folco	Gagnon
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Guarnieri
Guay	Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-
Côte-Nord)	
Hall Findlay	Harris (St. John's East)
Holland	Hughes
Hyer	Ignatieff
Jennings	Julian
Kania	Karygiannis
Laforest	Laframboise
Lalonde	Lavallée
Layton	LeBlanc
Lee	Lemay
Leslie	Lessard
Lévesque	MacAulay
Malhi	Maloway
Marston	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
McCallum	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Mendes	Minna
Mulcair	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Nadeau
Neville	Pacetti
Paillé	Patry
Pearson	Pomerleau
Proulx	Rae
Rafferty	Ratansi
Regan	Rodriguez
Rota	Roy

*Adjournment Proceedings*

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Scarpaleggia  
Silva  
Simson  
Thibeault  
Trudeau  
Vincent  
Wasylycia-Leis  
Wrzesnewskyj

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Siksay  
Simms  
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**NAYS**

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Bezan  
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Braid  
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)  
Bruinooge  
Calandra  
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)  
Casson  
Clarke  
Cummins  
Del Mastro  
Dreeshen  
Dykstra  
Finley  
Galipeau  
Glover  
Gourde  
Guergis  
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)  
Hill  
Hoepfner  
Jean  
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)  
Komarnicki  
Lake  
Lebel  
Lukiwski  
Lunney  
MacKenzie  
Mayer  
Merrifield  
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)  
Moore (Fundy Royal)  
Nicholson  
O'Connor  
Oda  
Payne  
Poilievre  
Raitt  
Rathgeber  
Richards  
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Albrecht  
Allison  
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Benoit  
Blackburn  
Block  
Boughen  
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Cadman  
Calkins  
Cannon (Pontiac)  
Chong  
Clement  
Dechert  
Devolin  
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)  
Fast  
Fletcher  
Gallant  
Goodyear  
Grewal  
Harper  
Hawn  
Hoback  
Holder  
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)  
Kent  
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)  
Lauzon  
Lemieux  
Lunn  
MacKay (Central Nova)  
Mark  
Menzies  
Miller  
Norlock  
Obhrai  
Paradis  
Petit  
Preston  
Rajotte  
Reid  
Richardson  
Ritz  
Scheer  
Shea  
Shory  
Stanton  
Strahl  
Tilson  
Trost  
Van Kesteren  
Vellacott  
Wallace  
Warkentin  
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to  
Wong  
Yelich

**PAIRED**

## Members

André  
Bachand  
Bonsant  
Brunelle  
Carrier  
Desnoyers  
Goldring  
Malo  
McLeod  
Paquette  
Smith  
Thompson

Asselin  
Beaudin  
Brown (Barrie)  
Carrie  
DeBellefeuille  
Flaherty  
Lobb  
McColeman  
O'Neill-Gordon  
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**The Speaker:** I declare the amendment lost.

\* \* \*

**ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

## INFRASTRUCTURE

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will begin with a quote from page 2 of the budget, which states:

Canada is in recession today. Measures to support the economy must begin within the next 120 days to be most effective.

Those 120 days come to an end the day after tomorrow and we remain very concerned that money simply has not been spent.

First, under the building Canada fund, we know that a fraction of the infrastructure money promised three years ago has been spent. We are very concerned now to learn that only a fraction of the stimulus funds approved in the budget has been spent. This is despite repeated recommendations that the program to spend infrastructure money for the purposes of stimulus be done not on the matching basis, as put forward by the government, but on the basis as recommended by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the official opposition, a gas tax-like program. The Liberals presented an motion recommending that the infrastructure money be spent on the basis of and in the process of a gas tax-like program as opposed to requiring matching, which a majority of the House voted in favour.

We are concerned, a concern that is supported by many municipal representatives, that the Conservative government knew when it made this plan that the municipalities would be unable to match the funds, as many municipalities expressed. The government therefore knew the funding would be slowed down and that those same municipalities would then be the ones blamed when needed infrastructure did not get built.

These are very serious concerns. The municipalities have said repeatedly that the gas tax fund has worked very well. We all know that strong accountability works well. They recommended that this type of process be used to fund the infrastructure, which is so desperately needed, and that the money flow. The official opposition has recommended the same. As I said, a motion was put forward in the House, which was adopted by the majority of the House, supporting that very notion.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

The current government has, as with a number of motions unfortunately, ignored the opinion of the House and the suggestions of it. It has continued to insist on an infrastructure program that requires matching funds from provinces and municipalities, knowing all along that most municipalities are simply not capable of matching the funds.

I have two questions for the hon. member.

First, how much money has actually been spent so far to date? I will preface by saying not announcements or re-announcements, but how much money has actually been spent, given the 100 day window? I insist on an answer that is money that is incremental to the building Canada fund. What has actually been spent over and above anything that had already been approved in prior budgets?

Second, why has the government actively ignored the recommendations of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and many individual municipalities and why has it ignored the motion to use a gas tax-like program to fund this, notwithstanding the majority view of the House of Commons?

•(1905)

**Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address the question raised by the member for Willowdale sometime back in March, and I am pleased to do so.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind hon. members of the efforts of this government and the tremendous efforts it has taken since introducing budget 2009 in January. We have taken real efforts to stimulate economic growth, create jobs and support Canadian families where they need it most.

Budget 2009 provided almost \$12 billion in new infrastructure funding over the next two years. This includes a \$4 billion infrastructure stimulus fund to help provinces, territories and municipalities get projects started as soon as possible. This is tremendous because this is new money to stimulate economic growth.

Further, the budget provided \$2 billion to accelerate construction at colleges at universities so that Canadians can get more education during this time of economic downturn.

Third, the budget provided \$1 billion to create a new green infrastructure fund. Canadians and Conservatives from coast to coast are adamant on having a new and better green future.

Finally, the budget provided \$500 million to support construction of new community recreational facilities and upgrades to existing facilities, as many places in Canada need upgraded facilities. Some communities do not have facilities. This is a very important for families.

Since the budget was originally tabled, it should be clear to the member opposite that we are taking serious action. In fact, we have announced more than 950 projects across the country worth almost \$3 billion in combined funding. I believe the records will show that the Liberals, when in government, never spent over \$2.3 billion in any given year. We did it in just months. This includes notable projects like the Sheppard East light-rail transit line that will extend the Sheppard subway line out to Scarborough and into the member's

riding, which is good news. I see that she is giving us the thumbs up on that.

We also doubled the gas tax fund, which she talked about, from \$1 billion to \$2 billion per year. In fact, we accelerated it because we listened to municipalities from coast to coast. We accelerated the first payment to municipalities from July 1 to April 1. That is great news for them. It is more money more quickly to start action quicker and get shovels in the ground. This is money paid directly into the pockets of municipalities, which they have been asking for and which this government delivered on.

We are continuing to work with our colleagues at provincial and municipal levels, including the member's own premier, Mr. McGuinty, in order to cut red tape and get projects moving as soon as possible. A big part of the success of this approach involves working with our partners. We work with the provinces, territories and municipalities in order to get the job done in the best interests of Canadians. By doing this, we will be able to invest three times more to do more projects and create three times more jobs.

We are only seven weeks into the fiscal year. We are getting the job done for Canadians and we are doing it in record time.

•(1910)

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to address the government patting itself on the back for doubling the gas tax fund that was promised by the Liberal government when it was still in power. I am pleased to see that the current Conservative government did not turn its back on that original Liberal promise. However, I would appreciate that when credit is being taken that credit would be given to the source.

The Minister of Finance, when he was attempting to get the budget pushed through and was worried that funding would not happen until the summer, said that it would not be good to wait until the summer because thousands and thousands of people would be negatively affected. He went on to say that the infrastructure would not be happening and that the spending would not be happening in our municipalities to repair roads, bridges and so on. He said that the whole purpose of the economic action plan was action, that it was not to wait six months or a year to get the job done.

I will remind the hon. member that, despite his efforts, he did not answer my questions. Action has not been taken. I wanted to know exactly how much money has been spent because announcements and re-announcements do not pay wages.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** Mr. Speaker, based on my experience in the House and seeing what has happened before, I can assure the member that if Liberal cheque promises could be cashed, every Canadian would be a multi-millionaire by now. However, that is not the case.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

We are moving 10 times faster than any government in history. We are getting the job done for Canadians. We are taking serious action across the country, not just in Liberal ridings. In fact, there are 140 projects in British Columbia with joint funding of \$290 million. In Nova Scotia, there are 26 projects with joint funding of \$55.8 million. In Newfoundland and Labrador, there are 22 projects, including joint funding of \$106.5 million. In Alberta, there is \$160 million. In Manitoba, there are 24 projects with \$160 million.

In a very short period of time we are getting the job done. Even in Ontario, there are 2,700 project proposals from 425 municipalities province wide. We are setting records, getting Canadians to work and doing it in record time.

## GOVERNMENT SPENDING

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last March I asked a question of the Minister of Finance concerning infrastructure money that had been budgeted in previous fiscal years by the Conservative government, which was approved by the House of Commons and which the government appeared to be letting lapse. There were still 26 days left of the fiscal year. There were \$2 billion of infrastructure money, the building Canada fund, that the Conservative government brought forward in 2006, money that had been approved and that the government had not sent out the door via cheques. Therefore, it was going to lapse.

The Minister of Finance tried to make fun of me saying that I did not know what I was talking about. In fact, that money did lapse. The money has been approved. It was money that municipalities and provinces were hungry for, that Canadians needed for eroding infrastructure and the government allowed it to lapse.

The parliamentary secretary referred to the Conservatives' January 2009-10 budget and their economic action plan. He said that they had announced 950 projects worth over \$3 billion. How many cheques have been mailed for those 950 project? We have seen the government make the same announcement over and over again, as though it is new money, it is a new project, but it is not. In fact, some announcements the Conservatives made recently were the same announcements made back in 2007, the exact same project, the exact same program, the exact same amount of money.

• (1915)

[Translation]

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities wants the government to let the federation's members use the gas tax fund. The federation itself says that the gas tax transfer method is efficient and transparent. Over 95% of the gas tax fund has been distributed to municipalities over the past two years. Let us not forget that it was a Liberal government that set up the fund. It was a Liberal government that said it would double the amount in 2005. If the Conservatives—who are trying to take the credit for doubling the gas tax rebate—had followed through on the Liberal government's commitment, we would be talking about \$3 billion now, not \$2 billion.

[English]

It is clear that the government is not sending the money out. The government is incompetent. The most efficient, effective and transparent way to ensure that infrastructure, which is needed for an economic stimulus in this Conservative recession, happens is to

transfer the money to the municipalities and the provinces through the gas tax fund, a direct transfer. They will then be able to carry out the infrastructure. The Conservatives know that many of the municipalities cannot borrow the money.

Why will the government not take the most effective, efficient way to get the money out the door to the municipalities so Canadians can have an infrastructure and an economy that might actually pick up?

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. friend for that rambling question, which I guess I can summarize what we are doing in this economic downturn. I am happy to take this opportunity to inform Parliament about how Canada is navigating during the current global economic downturn.

Before I continue, I would like to draw the attention of Parliament to the IMF's regional economic outlook that was released last week. I am sure members have read it, but let me quote directly from that report.

Canada is better positioned than many countries to weather the crisis. It entered the crisis from a position of strength, reflecting a track record of strong policy management that has supported underlying macroeconomic and financial stability. It has taken proactive steps to stimulate demand, ward off deflation, and enhance the toolkit for dealing with worsening financial strains if they emerge. Thanks to these factors, the strains evident in other countries, especially in the financial sector, are markedly less serious in Canada

Furthermore, when commenting on Canada's economic action plan and the other related actions to stimulate the Canadian economy, listen to the following report from IMF:

Building on the permanent tax relief measures announced in October 2007, the authorities tabled further fiscal stimulus of around 2.8 percent of GDP in January 2009. Taking into account supplementary provincial actions announced following the federal budget, the measures are among the largest across G-20 countries.

No wonder both the IMF and the OECD have declared that Canada will experience both the smallest contraction in the G7 for 2009 and the strongest recovery in the G7 for 2010.

Why are such respected international organizations supportive of Canada's economic outlook? It is likely because of the strength of the economic action plan, an aggressive plan that has taken, and continues to take, timely, targeted and temporary measures to first of all help families and stimulate consumer spending by lowering taxes, help those hardest hit by the global recession by extending EI by five weeks and protecting jobs and supporting businesses by investing in infrastructure. It also ensures access to financing for businesses and much more.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

No wonder a wide array of public interest groups heralded our economic action plan. Groups such as the CME noted that “Budget 2009 took critical steps in the budget to stimulate liquidity, provide incentives that will encourage manufacturers to invest in machinery and equipment...”. The Certified General Accountants' Association of Canada declared that the 2009 budget “provides the necessary support for economic stimulus and job creation”.

What is the Liberal leader's only idea during the current global economic downturn? It's that Canadians are not paying enough taxes and must send more of their hard-earned money to Ottawa. To quote the Liberal leader himself, “We will have to raise taxes”. The Liberal leader embracing the discredited tax-and-spend liberalism, as he muses about increasing the GST and imposing a new carbon tax, is clearly not what Canada's economy requires.

I ask the member opposite whether she agree with her leader's demand that Canadians must pay higher taxes.

• (1920)

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** Mr. Speaker, the member is telling falsehoods in this House, and he should be ashamed of himself. But let us get back to the point at hand, and that is this incompetent government.

The Canadian Federation of Municipalities has said that the gas tax fund and transfer to municipalities is the most effective, transparent and efficient way to allow municipalities to actually upgrade infrastructure and get the shovels in the ground now.

Under the gas tax fund, which was created by a Liberal government, the City of Dorval, in my riding, from the time it was created in 2005 until the end of the current fiscal year in 2010, will have received \$2,008,700. Montreal West, another municipality, will have received \$608,816. If they took the infrastructure money and put it into the gas tax transfer, Dorval would receive an additional \$803,000, whereas Montreal West would receive an additional \$243,000—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Ted Menzies:** Mr. Speaker, it is always more effective with finger pointing.

While the Liberal leader muses about increasing taxes, we are lowering taxes and keeping them lower even for Dorval airport. Indeed, in budget 2009 we delivered \$20 billion in personal income tax relief.

The Liberal leader apparently does not approve of lower taxes and is demanding we impose new job-killing taxes. What do Canadians think about the Liberal leader's musings? To quote from *The Windsor Star*:

[T]he last thing that Canadians want to hear during a recession is a politician talking about tax increases. But [the] federal Liberal Leader...has said he won't rule out a tax hike...

[His comments] ... should be setting off alarm bells with taxpayers.

## FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

**Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it was a few months ago when I started asking the Minister of Finance what the

government was doing to protect consumers from credit card gouging.

Last Friday, the government finally announced its plan but it fell well short of what is needed. Canadians were hoping for real measures that would cap sky-rocketing interest rates and stop the outrageous fees and penalties paid by consumers and merchants alike.

What Canadians got were half-measures on credit cards, half-measures that will offer no interest relief to working families that are struggling to make it through this economic recession, and half-measures that in the past have proved to be ineffective, such as financial literacy campaigns.

Only a few weeks ago, Saul Schwartz, a leading economist, revealed that there is no strong evidence financial literacy programs make any difference. The economist went on to say that the impact is limited and literacy programs represent a cynical attempt by financial service providers to avoid direct regulation.

It seems as though financial institutions have the last word when it comes to drafting government policy. This is bad news for Canadians who were hoping for much more on this credit card issue from the government. These half-measures fall well short of those that I put forward a month ago, measures that have the support of a majority of this House.

The measures I introduced are modelled on those that were recently passed by legislators in the United States. The act that was passed by our southern neighbours includes a clause that would stop arbitrary credit card rate increases, or any time, any reason interest rate hikes.

I have numerous examples of average Canadians, Canadians who work hard and pay their bills on time being hit with sky-rocketing interest rates. One individual showed me his bill. His interest rate jumped from 18% to over 25% because he made his payment two days late. It does not end there. I have emails from parents who are concerned about their 17 year old who was targeted by a credit card company and has a \$1,000 limit that is now maxed out, and that they are responsible for.

There are no clear guidelines and no transparency from the credit card companies. That is what we need.

It seems the government still does not understand what needs to be done. It would rather take its cues from the big banks and the Canadian Bankers Association.

This past Sunday on Rex Murphy's program, *Cross Country Checkup*, the president and CEO of the CBA echoed the government's response when he was asked what was being done for consumers last month. Nancy Hughes Anthony said that consumers should shop around for the best interest rate.

I think Ms. Hughes and the government need to come to terms with the fact that low interest rate cards should be offered by all banks and financial institutions.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

The New Democrats have a plan to stop credit card gouging. The motion passed last month includes measures to stop abusive fees and penalties, and the any time, any reason interest rate increases and account changes.

The reality is that having a large box on the bill or increasing the font size on credit card contracts does not help Canadian families who are hurting right now. It is time the government took bold action and listened to the will of Parliament instead of the will of the Canadian Bankers Association.

• (1925)

**Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to take this opportunity to inform Parliament about the important new proposed regulations that the Minister of Finance announced last week to limit business practices not beneficial to consumers, and provide clear and timely information to Canadians about credit cards.

This announcement follows through on our commitment in budget 2009 to ensure Canadian consumers using credit cards are treated fairly.

Unfortunately, the NDP members voted against the commitment in our economic action plan along with every single initiative we have introduced to protect consumers of financial products, but that is their record.

The NDP members voted against protecting credit card users, against improving financial literacy and against protecting consumers of stocks and other investments with a Canadian securities regulator. The list goes on and on.

The proposed regulations announced last week will first of all mandate an effective minimum 21 day interest free grace period on all new credit card purchases when a customer pays the outstanding balance in full.

The regulations will lower interest rate costs by mandating allocations of payments in favour of the consumer. They will also allow consumers to keep better track of their personal finances by requiring express consent for credit limit increases, as well as limit debt collection practices that financial institutions use in contacting a consumer to collect on a debt.

The regulations will also prohibit over the limit fees solely arising from holds placed by merchants. They will ensure clear information on credit contracts and application forms through a summary box that will set out key features such as interest rates and fees. They will assist consumers to manage their credit card obligations by providing information on the time it would take to fully repay the balance if only the minimum payment is made very month.

The regulations will mandate advance disclosure of interest rate increases prior to their taking effect, even if this information had been included in the credit contract. The proposed regulations would apply to credit cards issued by federally regulated institutions. Some provisions in the regulations would have a broader application to other financial products, such as fixed and variable rate loans as well as lines of credit.

I note that our announcement was warmly received by numerous public interest groups. For example, Casey Cosgrove, Director of

Financial Literacy Initiatives, Social and Enterprise Development Innovations, applauded it as it would “contribute to financial literacy by bringing clearer and more transparent information to consumers”.

Mel Fruitman, Vice President of Consumers' Association of Canada, on CTV Newsnet, heralded the announcement claiming it would “solve some of the most egregious practices of the credit card companies...it's a big step in the right direction towards helping us control the amounts we pay on our credit cards...it will greatly improve the situation”.

Even the Toronto *Star* cheered our Conservative government's action, noting that “welcome regulatory changes that will both introduce more transparency to the system and save consumers more money”.

• (1930)

**Mr. Glenn Thibeault:** Mr. Speaker, I guess I must congratulate the hon. member for acknowledging that he got some acknowledgement from the Toronto *Star* which rarely acknowledges anyone else but the Liberal Party. Therefore, congratulations on that.

I think it is important though that we talk about, yes, education is an important piece to this. I agree that it is an important piece. However, the concern that we are hearing from Canadian families right now, people who are holding their credit cards, is not people saying, “I wish I had a bigger font on my credit card bill to show me that I'm getting hit with 26% interest”.

What they want to know is what their bills are going to be at the end of the month. During this economic downturn, they need to be able to ensure that they are paying their mortgage and all of their other bills. Unfortunately right now, the credit card companies are not following through with this and we need to ensure that the government is at least looking at some type of legislation to protect consumers and merchants as well.

**Mr. Ted Menzies:** Mr. Speaker, while we took strong action to protect consumers using credit cards, the NDP members voted against it. What would they do instead? Interfere and control key aspects of the Canadian banking sector by dictating interest rates, something our government and the vast majority of public interest groups understand would be ineffective and unfeasible.

Listen to Duff Conacher of the Canadian Community Reinvestment Coalition. He said, “The problem with a cap on rates is where do you put it? Any number would be pretty arbitrary. And the banks are quite likely...to deny credit to some people”.

We also help consumers make informed credit card choices through the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada where they can compare packages and services. I would invite all Canadians to visit this website at [www.fcac.gc.ca](http://www.fcac.gc.ca).

*Adjournment Proceedings*

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly

the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:32 p.m.)

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