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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, September 15, 2009

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, September 15, 2009

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)
[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the following reports: a report entitled “Canada’s Engagement in Afghanistan”; “March 2009 Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan”; “Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan”; and “Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan”.

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PETITIONS

TRAFFICKING OF PERSONS

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I have with me 5,859 petitions calling on Parliament to encourage everyone to support Bill C-268, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (minimum sentence for offences involving the trafficking of persons under the age of eighteen years), which is coming up at the private members' session this afternoon.

These petitions come from all over Canada, a number of them from Quebec, and call on parliamentarians to support Bill C-268.

Over the break, 4,562 people presented this and had it in my office for me to present today.

NATIONAL MEMORIAL

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour this morning to table, on behalf of hundreds of people across Canada, a petition calling on Parliament to provide a suitable area of public lands to be used for a memorial wall of the names of Canada's fallen and to consider a shared funding arrangement with the registered charity established by Mr. Ed Forsyth, of Toronto, for the creation and future maintenance of this national shrine.

•(1010)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[English]

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

HOG INDUSTRY

The Speaker: The Chair has received a request for an emergency debate from the hon. member for Malpeque. I will hear the submissions of the hon. member on this point now.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have made a request for an emergency debate on the hog crisis in this country. Members of all parties have been hearing from farmers right across Canada, from coast to coast. It is one of the worst crises the hog industry has faced in our lifetime.

In my area in Atlantic Canada we have only 14 hog producers left in P.E.I., which is down from 600 ten years ago. There are only seven producers in New Brunswick, and they are down to four in Nova Scotia. We are at the point that we may not even be able to feed the one remaining plant in Atlantic Canada.

There were 600 producers from western Canada at a meeting in Manitoba in the spring, which members of the government and we, as the official opposition, attended. Those farmers are extremely worried about their future. They are losing their assets; they are losing their livelihood. This country is losing an industry with tremendous potential.

I have made the request for an emergency debate so that all parties can participate and outline the concerns of primary producers in the hog industry and what it means to the Canadian economy. The public should be aware of these issues. The government could report on what it is or is not doing relative to this crisis and bring greater profile to the emergency that the hog industry faces in this country.

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The Speaker: The Chair has carefully considered the remarks from the hon. member for Malpeque and also the letter he sent indicating his interest in pursuing debate of this matter in the House. While I have no doubt that there is a crisis in the hog industry in this country, it is not something that in my view is new. It has been going on now for many months, in fact.

The hon. member says it is worrisome, and I agree that it is, but I am not sure it meets the exigencies of the Standing Order in terms of being a sudden, blown-up crisis. It is a continuing and very serious difficulty that is faced by them.

I would urge the member to look at the possibility of having hearings in committees or other routes that are available rather than this one, because I am not sure it meets the exigencies of the Standing Order at this time.

Accordingly, I am going to decline the member's request at this moment, despite his able arguments.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The House resumed from September 14 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, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

The Speaker: When this matter was last before the House, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster embarked on questions and comments following his remarks. There are five minutes remaining in the time allotted for questions and comments for the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster. I therefore call on questions and comments.

The hon. member for Windsor West.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to make sure that we start this correctly. Could my colleague outline some of the sidebar agreements this deal has that are very unusual and create some concern? The environment and labour practices in particular, which have been dominant in this agreement, will allow for greater exploitation.

Why would the Government of Canada go into a privileged trading relationship? It is very important that we define that. We currently have trade with Colombia and we will continue to have trade with Colombia, but by agreeing to this type of a deal in the way that it is struck right now, we will be moving to a privileged trading relationship with a government that has had labour and civil society problems that have not been rectified.

Why the government would continue down that road with sidebar agreements is very disturbing, and I would like the member to describe some of those elements.

•(1015)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is inconceivable to me that Conservatives would vote for a privileged trade relationship, as the member for Windsor West mentions, with a government that has such an appalling human rights records.

It has the highest rate of killings of labour activists on the entire planet and a president who was named by the United States Defense Intelligence Agency as 82nd on the list of Colombian narco-traffickers. In the Defense Intelligence Agency's internal memos, he was defined as a Colombian politician dedicated to collaboration with the Medellín cocaine cartel at the highest government levels. Conservative MPs want this privileged trading relationship with somebody who is defined by the U.S. as a narco-trafficker. He was 82nd on the list.

The Conservative government tries to defend this by saying it has put in protection side deals. The member for Edmonton—Strathcona spoke very eloquently yesterday about the fact that the environmental side deal offers no environmental protection.

However, the most egregious aspect of the deal is the provision that one can kill a trade unionist and pay a fine. As the killing of labour activists continues, the Colombian government will essentially have to pay a fine to itself. That is the great provision the Conservative government and the Minister of International Trade have provided as a protection for human rights.

Imagine if Conservative MPs were trying to defend the same thing in their ridings, saying that one can kill people but they will have to pay a fine afterwards. That is absolutely appalling. I am glad the member for Windsor West asked that question.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to follow up on the answer to the question by the member who has been driving the effort to stop this free trade agreement and who has so far been successful in stopping it from getting through the House.

I am surprised that any member in the House would support a free trade agreement with a country that has seen 27 trade unionists killed as well as 60 to 70 extrajudicial murders in 2009 so far. I got these statistics from my local steelworkers. As a country that respects and lives according to democratic principles, why would we want to enter into any agreement of this nature with a country?

Yessika Hoyos Morales, the daughter of one of the trade unionists who was killed, was in my office last year pleading on behalf of the families of trade unionists who are simply exercising a right that we take for granted in this country and so many other jurisdictions around the world. She visited some other members as well. She pleaded that we stop this nonsense and not give credence in any way to a regime that is doing this kind of killing.

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, the number of killings has actually escalated. In 2008 there were nearly 600 killings in Colombia by paramilitary groups and the Colombian military, as defined by the Center for Popular Research, Education and Policy.

To those Conservatives who say he had links with the drug lords in the past but he has reformed, I will just mention that recently another drug lord, the successor to Pablo Escobar, said that he financed President Uribe's 2002 presidential campaign.

Shame on Conservatives. Shame on—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Madam Speaker, many of my constituents have sent me letters and emails urging me to vote against the Colombia free trade bill before us today.

I have studied the bill and the current situation in Colombia, so I will have no problem doing as they ask because I feel the same way. I also had the opportunity to meet several Colombians, including refugees and unionists, who told me about the violence that prevails in their country and their complete opposition to Canada signing a trade agreement with the existing regime in Bogota. I would therefore invite my colleagues from all parties to oppose this bill for two main reasons.

First, the agreement will have a minimal effect on trade relations between Canada and Colombia. Colombia is just not one of Canada's more significant trading partners. As many members of the House have already said, the main reason that the Canadian government wants to sign this free trade agreement has nothing to do with trade and everything to do with investments. The chapter on investment protection is the real impetus behind this agreement. Canada-Colombia trade is a minor consideration, but current and projected Canadian investments are consequential, particularly in the mining sector.

I have no doubt that this draft agreement came about because special interests in that sector put pressure on the Canadian government. Judging by all of the investment protection agreements that Canada has signed over the years, this one with Colombia seems neo-liberal to the core. In fact, every previous agreement contains provisions allowing Canadian investors to sue the government of the signatory country in which they invest if that government passes measures that reduce their investment returns. Such provisions are particularly dangerous in a country where labour and environmental protection laws are arbitrary at best.

By protecting Canadian investors from requirements meant to improve standards of living in Colombia, this agreement could halt social and environmental progress in a country that desperately needs it. Any attempt the Colombian government might make to improve things would subject it to legal action by Canadian investors.

Second, Colombia has one of the worst human rights records in the world, and certainly in Latin America. To improve the human rights situation in the world, western governments, at least those that advocate for justice, generally use the carrot and stick approach. They support efforts to improve human rights and reserve the right to cut rewards if the situation worsens.

If this free trade agreement were signed, Canada would lose any chance of putting pressure on Colombia. In fact, not only would it

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give up the possibility of using the carrot and stick, but it would essentially hand them over to the Colombian government.

The government keeps telling us that the free trade agreement comes with side agreements on labour and the environment. But these agreements are notoriously ineffective and are not part of the free trade agreement, which means that some investors could destroy the Colombian environment, relocate populations to establish their mines, or continue to have anyone who opposes their project, in particular union members, killed, all with impunity. Since 1986, 2,690 union members have been killed in Colombia.

• (1020)

And we can unfortunately not count on the Colombian authorities to improve the situation.

The Colombian branch of the international organization Transparency International published a report last summer on corruption in Colombia. According to the report, which was the result of a project funded by the British and Dutch governments, only 4 of the 138 state entities in Colombia have a low level of corruption. It is a very detailed report that offers further explanation.

One of the organizations that the study found to have a very high level of corruption was the Colombian Congress itself. According to the report, the Ministry of the Interior and Justice has a high level of corruption.

Anyone who can read Spanish can view the detailed report on the Internet.

The Bloc Québécois is against trading away the Canadian government's ability to press for human rights to provide Canadian corporations with foreign investment opportunities.

Colombian civil society also opposes this agreement. However, because of the repression that exists there, it is harder for Colombian civil society to really get organized and have its say. But on February 11, 2009, four of my colleagues, the hon. members for Sherbrooke, Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, and Joliette, as well as Paul Crête, met with the Coalition of Social Movements and Organizations of Colombia, or COMOSOC. That meeting was organized by the CCIC. I would remind the House that COMOSOC is made up of the National Organization of Indigenous People in Colombia, the Popular Women's Organization, the National Agrarian Coordinator, Christians for Peace with Justice and Dignity, the National Movement for Health and Social Security, the Afro-Colombian National Movement, and so on.

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The COMOSOC delegation wanted to refute the claims made by the Colombian government and the Canadian government: the human rights situation in Colombia has not improved. Many organizations in Quebec and in Canada have spoken out against this agreement, including the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, Amnesty International, the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec, the Catholic organization Development and Peace, KAIROS, the Public Service Alliance of Canada, Lawyers Without Borders, the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the National Union of Public and General Employees.

As we can see, many people oppose this plan. Once again, I invite all members of the House to vote against this bill.

● (1025)

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Madam Speaker, as a member of the international trade committee, I had an opportunity to be in Colombia and meet with the president, as well as some of his other cabinet colleagues. I must say that I am very impressed by the number of witnesses who we were able to hear from and the challenges that country has had to undergo in the last number of years.

Our friends across the aisle talk about the violence and what goes on there. There is no question that country has had its share of challenges, but it is my profound belief that if we do not give it an opportunity to trade with this free trade agreement, we are going to limit the kinds of opportunities that country has moving forward.

I know my friends across the aisle like to comment on all the violence and crimes, and they refer to numbers in 2008-09. What they fail to recognize and acknowledge is that under this president, since 2002 more than 30,000 paramilitary fighters have returned to civilian life. Since 2002, homicides have declined by 40%, kidnappings by 82% and terrorist attacks by 77%.

I would say to my friends across the way that if they are going to quote numbers, let us talk about the historical context. Let us talk about the time since President Uribe has been in government. Let us talk about the time that he has had since 2002.

Does Colombia have challenges? There is no question it does, but I believe that free trade is one of the ways to help Colombia emerge as a stronger country. I also believe that Canada and the leadership that it is playing, because of its rich and diverse connections to that country and to the hemisphere, have made this possible. I realize that Canada has both the opportunity and the responsibility to be active in this hemisphere, and there are critical and important issues to all countries in this region.

I would like to highlight today the key features of our Americas engagement, which reinforces Canada's commitment to deepening its participation in the region. Clearly, as the region addresses the worldwide economic downturn, it is timely to assess how we are all acting and co-operating in bringing solutions.

We have evolved together in this region in the past to address a range of problems, from endemic poverty and inequalities to bolster common security and economic development. Canada has long-

standing, rich and diverse connections to countries of the Americas. We have been forging privileged partnerships and commercial ties with the region as a whole for over 100 years, producing results that have been mutually beneficial.

The UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean reported last year that Canada has become the third largest investor in the region. Foreign direct investment from Canada into the Americas, excluding Mexico and Bermuda, now stands at approximately \$95 billion. To put that number into perspective, that is about three times the size of Canadian investment in Asia.

While this covers a multitude of sectors, investments in financial services and extractive sectors have been notable. Canadian banks, with a long presence in the Caribbean, now bring stability and much needed credit throughout the Americas. Canadian mining and exploration companies are also on the leading edge of the application of the best practices of corporate social responsibility.

At a time when investment from outside the region is not always as scrupulous in attending to questions such as labour standards or community services and engagement, we are proud that Canadian companies serve as standard bearers to this region.

Up until the recent economic downturn, our commercial relations had been on a steep growth curve. Our trade with the region in 2008 grew by almost 30%. This is due to a combination of factors, including strong demand for Canadian offerings and our competitive price points, but I believe that the strong message that our government has been sending on the importance of bolstering free trade and open markets has played a key role.

Certainly, we have been among the most active free trader in the region. We are building our successful free trade agreements with the United States, Mexico, Chile, Costa Rica and a recent free trade agreement with Peru, which entered into force on August 1, 2009.

In 2008, Canada signed a free trade agreement with Colombia and it is now before us for ratification. Canada and Panama also concluded negotiations on August 11, 2009. We have ongoing negotiations with the Dominican Republic, CARICOM and Central American countries.

● (1030)

As for the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement and its parallel agreements on labour co-operation and the environment, it is part of a suite of instruments Canada uses in its engagement with Colombia. These instruments include bilateral and development co-operation, and the Department of Foreign Affairs global peace and security fund. All of these support Colombia's ongoing efforts toward greater peace, security, prosperity and full respect for human rights.

In the past five years, the Canadian International Development Agency has disbursed over \$64 million alone in Colombia. CIDA's programming in that country is focused on children's rights and their protection while supporting initiatives that protect internally displaced people and other vulnerable populations.

I will say that while we were in Colombia, we had a chance to see first-hand some of the great work that CIDA is doing with those projects.

As a country of the Americas, Canada has a vested interest in the progress of countries in the Americas. Our economic success, our profound belief in democracy and the rule of law, and the national and personal security of our citizens, both within and beyond our borders, are all intricately linked with the welfare of our hemispheric neighbours. This recognition is at the core of Canada's engagement in the Americas.

As a committed member of the inter-American system, Canada has both the opportunity and the responsibility to be active on hemispheric issues of critical importance to all countries in the region. Our engagement in the Americas is focusing Canada's efforts on three interrelated and mutually reinforcing objectives: enhancing the prosperity of the citizens in the region; strengthening and reinforcing support for democratic governance throughout the Americas; and building a safe and secure hemisphere.

I will briefly summarize each of these points, beginning with prosperity.

To say the least, prosperity has become more elusive of late for all countries in all hemispheres. Canada is faring better than most countries but Canadians have not been spared from the wretched impacts of the worldwide recession. Despite continued economic uncertainty, most countries in the Americas are arguably better prepared than in the past to weather the global downturn. Since the 1990s, many have worked hard to improve their debt situations. They now have lower total debt ratios, reduced interest rates and increased debt service requirements. In fact, many of these countries enjoy fiscal surpluses.

Thanks to these efforts, many countries will be in a better position to rebound when better days return, and they will if the lure of short-term measures, whether populous or protectionist, can be resisted. In this regard, there does exist a risk that the blame for current market failure will be unfairly attributed to capitalism rather than to the specific capitalists who, in the absence of adequate supervision, contributed to this outcome.

In the region, one can detect the return of antiquated views, favouring import substitution and rejecting globalization. This must be resisted. Realistic solutions need to be identified and addressed.

Finally, we need to resist protectionism in every sense, and here I refer not only to tariff protectionism but also the impact of spending measures and rescue bailouts. Evidently, these must be managed in a way that does not damage market participation in the region.

On security, these effects on the economic crisis cannot be viewed in isolation. They have a clear and identifiable impact on security and governance in the region.

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The medium-term implications on reduced remittances, returning migrants, rising unemployment and falling government revenues. Some might call that a perfect storm. What we see is a clear reason to increase our engagement in addressing security problems in the Americas.

As a result, Canada is assisting countries in the region in their efforts to strengthen their law enforcement, judicial system, disaster relief for preparedness and health issues. Working together, we are confident we can reduce the impact of crime, drugs, terrorism, disasters and pandemics on Canadians and citizens of the Americas.

In this vein, DFAIT's global peace and security program has developed over \$14.5 million in conflict prevention and peace-building programs in Colombia between 2006 and 2009. This program focuses on truth, justice and confidence-building initiatives, supports political dialogue and enhances security and stability.

I believe there is every reason for optimism, the current economic climate notwithstanding. By pursuing this model of partnership, I have no doubt that together we can strengthen hemispheric co-operation in support of peace, security and development, and produce long-term results that will benefit us all.

For those reasons, I ask all hon. members for their support of this agreement.

• (1035)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, at the beginning of his speech, the member mentioned that the international trade committee visited Colombia. Obviously, it is best to have first-hand knowledge. I am very interested in what happened there because I have not heard about that visit or about what the member heard during that visit. If the member could give us more details, it would be helpful to all members in the House.

Mr. Dean Allison: Madam Speaker, one of the things we, as a trade committee, found interesting when we went to Colombia was that we heard from a wide range of groups.

One of the things I found particularly interesting was who the president had surrounded himself with. As some may know, President Uribe's father was killed in a kidnapping attempt by the FARC in 1982. Some of the people the president had around him, in terms of cabinet ministers, had also been affected by the violence in Colombia. One of the things that is telling is when Venezuela showed up on the border of Colombia and the U.S. asked Colombia what it required, was it guns or ammunition, the president's response was, "We need a free trade deal."

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What I find impressive about the Colombian government and what I find interesting in talking to people on the ground is that they realize they have had a history of violence, civil war and a problem with a lot of issues. What I find surprising and interesting is that they do not want to continue on that path. They would like to use free trade as a means of trying to improve the quality of life of their citizens, to have more value in their country and to depend less on the drug trade.

One of the things I believe would be helpful is our support for this agreement that would help enable Colombia in that respect.

• (1040)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am a little flabbergasted with regard to why the Liberals and the Conservatives would want to support such an agreement given the fact that there have been 2,690 trade unionists murdered in Colombia since 1986, 27 of them this year alone.

Do you think we should actually turn a blind eye to workers being murdered?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I would remind the hon. member to address her comments to the Chair.

The hon. member for Niagara West—Glanbrook.

Mr. Dean Allison: Madam Speaker, I know the member for Burnaby—New Westminster is always complaining about how we do not use facts, figures and studies but here is a study called “Colombia FTA: Prosperity & Democracy”. It states that the AFL-CIO repeatedly cites figures of 2,245 labour union members killed in Colombia since 1991 as a central argument for not approving the trade agreement. However, that figure is heavily front-loaded. More than four out of five of those killings took place prior to President Uribe's administration.

Once again I would ask for consistency across the aisle. Those members should not mislead the House in terms of where these situations are coming from and to recognize that there has been a challenge of conflict in this region and to realize that President Uribe is doing his best to reduce the violence. Yes, there is still violence, and we understand that, but, quite clearly, it is labour that wants to brand President Uribe's government with these deaths when these deaths happened before he was actually in government.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to direct the line of questioning to something the member was talking about concerning the importance of trade in this hemisphere and to contrast that with what we have done in the past.

Could the member touch on the impact President Chavez is having on some of the other countries with what he is doing as opposed to what Canada plans to do through free trade?

Mr. Dean Allison: Madam Speaker, I think what we see happening in Venezuela is more of a protectionist measurement. Colombia wants to reach out, not just to Canada but to other countries in order to be able to trade and rely less on the drug trade and some of the other issues they have had to deal with over time.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am happy to participate in the debate. For purposes of clarity for those

who are watching these proceedings on television, we are not actually debating the agreement, the proposal by the minister to send the bill to committee. We are actually debating a subamendment of an amendment. Both the subamendment and the amendment to the motion suggest that the House should not give second reading because the government concluded this agreement while the Standing Committee on International Trade was considering the matter. I will try to understand the position of the Bloc and the New Democratic Party. The subcommittee on international trade was considering this question and, therefore, we should not send the agreement to committee because the committee was already considering the question.

You are looking at me a little confused, Madam Speaker, and I can understand why that is the case. The reason is that it does not make any sense. What we need to recognize is that there are serious issues about this agreement and there are legitimate areas of concern and debate. There is no question that a public hearing and a public discussion with expert witnesses and a reasoned discussion at committee is fully warranted.

In order to anticipate some of the questions, which I know I will get from some members of the House, a recent exchange between the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing and my colleague from Niagara West—Glanbrook was to say that there have been hundreds of killings. We can all argue about the numbers but the question was whether we support the killing of trade unionists in Colombia. The answer to that question is, of course not. The killing of anyone is horrendous. The killing of people who are exercising their democratic rights is an appalling situation.

The question before the House and the question that I personally hope will get to committee at some stage is whether a free trade agreement would contribute to an improvement in the overall human rights and economic situation in Colombia or whether it would cause a deterioration and a worsening of the human rights condition in that country. That is a factual question. There will be lots of debate about it but it is not an ideological question.

To suggest, as was suggested by my colleague from the Bloc in his speech, that Canadian companies are in the business of sanctioning the killing of trade unionists or to suggest that anyone in the House looks with favour upon people living in dangerous and difficult conditions simply shows how quickly we assume the worst motivations on all sides of the House. I have been at this coal face too long to make any such assumption. I assume that everyone here believes that killing other people is a bad thing. I believe very strongly that we are all committed to human rights and the extension of human rights. I will not accuse someone who is in favour of a free trade agreement of being opposed to human rights and being in favour of assassinations. That is just an absurdity. It takes the debate to a level where it is absolutely to have a reasonable and serious discussion.

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I will go back to the fundamental question. The government of Colombia decided some time ago that it would try to create an economic strategy that would allow it to get out of the situation in which it found itself. It is a country whose market internally is not big enough. Unlike its neighbour, Venezuela, it cannot rely on the oil and gas reserves that it has in order to generate a huge income for itself. It does not have the luxury of protectionism and, therefore, it was essential for it to engage with the rest of the world economically. This was all part of the strategy that does not simply start with President Uribe but certainly was one that he had a great deal to do with extending.

•(1045)

It is important for members to understand that we are not the only country with which Colombia has either succeeded in concluding a free trade agreement or is currently negotiating a free trade agreement. The member countries of the European Union, the member countries of the European Free Trade Association, which are all democratic countries, which are all countries with a vibrant trade union movement, which are all countries that have a powerful commitment to human rights, countries like Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Britain, France and Germany, are currently negotiating a freer trade arrangement with Colombia. So, of course is the United States of America. Colombia has already concluded free trade agreements with its neighbouring Andean countries.

So, the suggestion that this is some sort of conspiracy that is under way to undermine human rights organizations or to undermine the labour movement in Colombia is not simply far-fetched, it is also a question, frankly, that just does not stand up to real analysis.

Now, there are parties in this House that are ideologically opposed to any free trade agreement that comes before us. If it comes before us with EFTA, they are opposed to the one with EFTA. When we come to discuss the question of the EU, I can guarantee they will be opposed to the one with the European Union.

Those of us who do not have these ideological blinkers on have to look practically at this question. There is a very legitimate concern that has been raised and that will be raised again which is what exactly the impact of this kind of an agreement is going to be on the human rights situation in Colombia.

First, let me just make it clear how I think we need to look at this question.

We are trading today with Colombia. That is to say Canadian companies are doing business in Colombia. It is perfectly legal. It is there. It is happening. There is nothing bad about that, unless it is being suggested by some people that there should be no trade whatsoever with Colombia, that there should be no economic relationship with Colombia and that the rest of the world should boycott Colombia and there should be an international freeze on any investment, any trade, any economic relationship with Colombia. If that is the position that is being put forward by some of my colleagues in the House, I would like to hear them suggest it. I would like to hear them analyze it. However, the fact of the matter is we are trading today. As a country, our businesses are trading with Colombian businesses, and Colombian businesses are trading with us. There are cut flowers in our market. All these things are taking place.

The question then becomes whether we want to try to create a set of rules that will provide for greater certainty with respect to the trading relationship that we are establishing.

Personally, I am a multilateralist at heart. I favour broader multilateral agreements. I would like to see nothing better than for the Doha round to be reignited and to proceed again and for us to try to create a stronger rules-based system for how we trade in the world.

We support the World Trade Organization. I do not hear suggestions from the Bloc or from the NDP that we pull out of the World Trade Organization or that we ask that Colombia be kicked out of the World Trade Organization of which Colombia is currently a member.

So, let us try to understand. Is there a mutual benefit to our two countries to expanding trade? Is there a mutual benefit to our two countries in continuing to monitor and to talk about and to discuss and to try to influence in two sovereign independent countries the human rights situation, in their country and, frankly, in our country?

•(1050)

[*Translation*]

Is there a good reason why we, as Canadians, want to have a relationship that provides greater guarantee of the security required for investment? Is it a good idea for us to give Colombian companies the opportunity to increase their exports to Canada? There is a great deal of poverty in Colombia and it needs economic development. So, we do want this.

[*English*]

I would say let this matter go when the debate is concluded, whenever that may be. My view is this is a trade agreement that should go to committee. It should be thoroughly studied. Let the international trade committee resume the study that it was doing with respect to the agreement, and let it proceed. I think it would be wrong of us to take a decision today to say that, no, we are not going to let that happen, that we are not even going to consider this question because a group of people say they know better and they know what the outcome is better than anyone else.

I am not sure I have possession of all the facts that would allow me to reach that conclusion, and I simply want this matter to proceed to committee at the appropriate time.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, I of course listened with intent to my colleague on the other side, the critic for foreign affairs, on this issue of sending the bill to the committee.

The member is a member of the foreign affairs committee, of which I am also a member, and we discuss many issues.

However, the main question that his party has been talking about is sending it to the committee to see what impact it will have on the larger scale in Colombia regarding human rights and regarding labour standards and all those issues. Those are of course core Canadian values when we do business around the world.

Government Orders

To some degree, I agree with him in talking about the NDP and the Bloc. They will never agree to any free trade agreement in any event. That debate is a totally different issue.

The point is that we have free trade agreements with many countries around the world. There are examples of issues when we do that. So I would ask the hon. member's opinion. The free trade agreements ultimately do result in good labour practices and good human rights, and is that not what all of us want for Colombia?

• (1055)

Hon. Bob Rae: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question from the parliamentary secretary. I have to confess that I do not have an all-in ideological answer to that question.

In my view it can be the case that an increase in economic activity, plus an increase in the bilateral relationship in terms of the discussions that we have with the Government of Colombia, and not just the Government of Colombia but the discussions that we have with the people of Colombia and with the institutions—

My colleague, the member for Kings—Hants, and I had a chance to go to Colombia in August. We had an intensive four-day visit. We met with a broad range of people. Most were in favour of the agreement, some were opposed. All of them were very concerned about the impact of the agreement on human rights. I was quite struck by the number, which even included trade unionists.

The private sector trade union people that we met with in Medellin, for example, were fully in favour of the agreement. They understood full well that it gives their factories greater access to the Canadian market. They understood that very easily and very quickly. They see that as improving their conditions and as a chance to improve their particular position.

The largely public-sector-dominated central trade union federation was, not surprisingly, opposed to the free trade agreement, so I asked whether it was in favour of any free trade agreements, and it said no. It has a completely different model of what the Colombian economy could be like. I did not think it was a very realistic model, given the choices that Colombia currently faces.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am saddened by the member's comments.

While he and his colleague from Kings—Hants were in Colombia as guests of the Colombian government, 12 members of the Awa first nations were massacred by the Colombian military.

The Liberal Party used to stand up for human rights, used to speak out on issues like that. Twelve members of the Awa first nations were massacred by the Colombian military as nearly 600 Colombians have been massacred by the Colombian military and massacred by paramilitaries associated with President Uribe's regime, and the Liberal Party prefers to keep sipping on its wine. It is very sad.

There are provisions in the agreement that basically allow the Colombian government to continue to see the killings of trade unionists, human rights activists and other Colombians, and the only provisions force a fine.

Does the member think it is appropriate that one can kill a trade unionist and pay a fine?

Hon. Bob Rae: Madam Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for the parliamentary process, but it is very difficult to answer a question that is put in such a fashion.

Basically the member is saying that he knows it is the Colombian government that is responsible for every act of violence that takes place in Colombia. Therefore, any one of us who thinks it is appropriate to continue to have discussions with the Colombian government about improving our economic relationship as well as on the environmental review and the overall review of the political situation in Colombia is somehow condoning violence.

When the member refers to—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member has made his position quite clear.

Resuming debate. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I speak to the issue of corporate social responsibility today as it relates to the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement.

I agree completely with the Liberal foreign affairs critic when he says that there are those of us who support this agreement. I also agree with his statement that NDP members are talking nonsense when they say that by supporting this agreement we are condoning murder or human rights abuses or the violence that is taking place in Colombia. That is totally misleading and is fearmongering by the NDP, done by the NDP to support the position they always take, which is against this free trade agreement.

Why do they not just say they oppose it because of their ideology? To say that this is directly related to violence is absolutely nonsense. I want to make it very clear that is not the position here.

Today I am standing up to talk about the corporate social responsibility that Canadian companies undergo when they go overseas to do business. The free trade agreement with Colombia would allow a lot of Canadian companies to go there, so social corporate responsibility becomes a key element in the operation of Canadian companies and what Canadians have come to accept.

The Government of Canada undertook a very lengthy in-depth analysis of corporate social responsibility with stakeholders in Canada, with all those involved in corporate social responsibilities, including NGOs, government people, and industrial people. We came up with a voluntary code of conduct which the government has now provided to Parliament in response. This extensive corporate social responsibility analysis done by the Government of Canada and all Canadian stakeholders has laid the foundation for what is expected of Canadian companies when they are in other countries.

Government Orders

I was in Tanzania in April of this year as well as in Zambia where Canadian companies are working. I had the pleasure of talking to the companies to see what they were doing as part of their corporate social responsibility. I was very impressed at the amount of effort Canadian companies are putting toward corporate social responsibilities such as providing fresh water, schools, and little dispensaries which the local government cannot provide. These Canadian companies are providing these basic services on a voluntary basis and giving hope to many.

Canadians should be proud of many of these companies. The majority of companies that operate overseas do a fantastic job with respect to corporate social responsibility. That is why Canadian companies and Canadians in general have such a high reputation around the world.

This is something the NDP should go and see. Those members would never go to countries where progress has taken place. They will always choose countries that are mired in violence and come forward with their ideology to oppose the free trade agreement.

As a result of the in-depth consultation that took place, the Government of Canada will soon be creating a new consular office to help resolve any issue that could arise between Canadian companies and the communities in which they operate. An announcement will be made very shortly. This is one way of ensuring that everyone will voluntarily comply with what is expected, which has come out of the round table conference. The government has taken this strong, positive step to ensure that all stakeholders adhere to the recommendations regarding corporate social responsibility.

The Government of Canada is also going to support a new centre of excellence. This centre of excellence should be outside of the government to develop high quality tools for corporate social responsibility to see what our best practice is. This is a joint venture with the stakeholders. These are some of the positive steps that this government is taking arising out of the consultation process, which is the right way to do things when we talk about this.

• (1100)

This brings me to the question of looking at what the government's approach has been in talking to stakeholders. We have a Liberal member's private member's bill, Bill C-300, which is now before the committee and which has been hastily prepared without stakeholders' input into it. It was badly drafted and would penalize Canadian companies doing business overseas. The bill is one of those bills that has been emotionally created without input from company stakeholders. It just follows an emotional outburst.

This is not how a minority Parliament should work. I would be very much interested to hear the stance of the Liberal trade critic, whose speech I read, and the Liberal foreign affairs critic, who just spoke about how free trade agreements have a potential of helping in this country, on Bill C-300. This is contrary to what they have been talking about. I hope that common sense prevails on the other side and that when it comes before the committee they will kill this bill. This bill has the potential of damaging the great reputations of people doing business overseas.

The intention is good. We all want corporate social responsibility to take place, but the way it was brought forward, the way it was drafted and the way it has lacked consultations and been coached is just using the minority status to push through something that would have serious consequences for Canadian companies, NGOs and everybody else. There is a small minority of NGOs who are supporting this, but I think that overall, under this major exercise that the Government of Canada undertook last year on corporate social responsibility, that is the way the government should be working. That is how we should work on this thing.

I am very happy to state that the Government of Canada is taking corporate social responsibility very seriously. As I have just said, we will be making announcements about our new councillor as well as the centre for excellence. It must be recognized that the free trade agreement, with its side agreements on labour as well as the environment and other issues, will ensure that there is a rules-based system in our dealings with Colombia.

That is what every Canadian wants because that would ensure strong ties between Canada and Colombia. At the same time, we can engage with Colombia on issues of human rights and others.

• (1105)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member, in his speech, complained a lot about Bill C-300. Unfortunately, his government was basically the author of that bill by not reacting to the major exercise he talked about, which was corporate social responsibility.

The Government of Canada-sponsored round table with industry and NGOs came up with solutions and recommendations. This was quite a rare situation where everyone agreed to that extent and came up with some good solutions, yet the government did not react. It sat on it for months and months, even though everyone agreed. Even though the government was a sponsor in part, it did not react.

What the member was complaining about was unfortunately caused by his own government's inaction. Even after Bill C-300, it came up with an inadequate response. It was the government's inaction that inspired Bill C-300 and also the motion by the member for Pierrefonds—Dollard to take action on something that industry and NGOs had agreed upon.

Mr. Deepak Ohrai: Madam Speaker, yesterday there was a round table conference. There were recommendations. The government needs to take its due diligence and look at it. In all agreements, all rules are made. This party was the government and its members know how it works, but at the end of the day the government did respond. The government has tabled the response in the House of Commons as well, and I have just announced what the government will be doing.

We must also remember corporate social responsibility by Canadian companies, and I have given the example in Tanzania and Zambia, where they have an excellent record. It is not that we do not have a record. We have a very good record, so henceforth, we are just building to ensure that it will be even stronger, as the member and everybody else wants.

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• (1110)

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to ask the member, given his critique of the New Democratic Party's position and the fact that we—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I do not believe his mike is on.

Mr. Tony Martin: I did want to ask the member a question, Madam Speaker, in reference to his critique of the New Democratic Party's very real concern when we enter into negotiations and possible trade agreements with countries where there is obviously a high level of violence, particularly violence targeted at those who simply want to exert their right to democracy and participation in their own local economies.

I want to know if it does not concern him at all, as some of the facts and figures that are documented, recorded, and coming out of Colombia where, as I have said earlier, this year alone 27 trade unionists have been killed. There were 67 extrajudicial murders, people in the justice system of Colombia losing their lives, and 600 people massacred. My colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster mentioned that a little earlier. Do those numbers not in any way cause the member some concern with regard to this free trade agreement?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Of course, Madam Speaker, it causes great concern to all of us when we see all these murders and deaths taking place, including the trade unionists. We are all aware that all these things are happening. We are engaging ourselves with the government of Colombia to work with the government, as the elected authority there, and to bring those who have committed all these crimes to justice. That should be the key element of the whole thing.

However, to put the free trade agreement in that context is not the right thing to do because we would then be penalizing all the people of Colombia, the poor and everyone else, who would have an open market to us.

Would the hon. member not want all the people of Colombia to have free access to Canadian markets so they can sell and have a better living standard there?

I want to repeat, in reference to all those killings, I agree that this is a matter of serious concern, and those who are committing those crimes should be brought to justice. The responsibility lies with the government of Colombia to do that, and we will bring that to the attention of the government of Colombia. However, we should not, at the same time, penalize the people of Colombia who would like to do business with Canada and have a better standard of living.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-23, which is the free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia.

I want to set the frame for my own involvement in this debate by saying that this was a difficult bill for me at first. I have met with delegations from Colombia and union organizers here who have expressed concerns about the human rights in that country. I take that seriously.

Colombia is a violent country. There are many instances of corruption and human rights violations, which is consistent with a

narco-economy. It is indisputable that there is instability in Colombia and there have been human rights violations. It is also indisputable that there have been improvements economically, socially, and in terms of safety, so we balance off those two different issues.

The question for the people of that country is: How will things get better? Is the move more negative or positive for countries like Canada to engage Colombia? Of course, we have heard Canada is not alone. Many other countries are doing the same thing, looking at trade agreements with this country.

As members of Parliament, balance is something we deal with all the time on issues. We balance local concerns with national concerns. We are always looking at what our constituents want with what we consider to be the national interest. Also, the party under whose banner we were elected plays a role as well.

We balance the time that we spend on constituency work with the time we spend on national issues or perhaps party responsibilities, being a minister, a critic or work on committees. One of the difficult things about politics is finding the right balance.

On issues, quite often, it is a matter of finding a balance as well. We deal with issues that challenge us. There are pros and cons on both sides of an issue. How do we work within Parliament and even within our own parties to move the ball on things and to advance not only Canadian interests but the interests of people with whom we deal?

I want to pay tribute and offer my thanks to the Liberal critic for international trade. On a number of issues, he and I have had very serious discussions about concerns I have had and maybe issues on which we differed in the beginning. It is through working with him and the leadership that he has provided the Liberal caucus that we have been able to come up with solutions that make sense.

There have been a number of contentious issues on the trade front. The EFTA deal was one. It was difficult for me, my colleague from Halifax West, and those of us who have been actively supporting the shipbuilding industry with the negligence that has been shown by the government. A potential negative impact in the EFTA deal was its impact on Canadian shipbuilding. This Colombian deal is difficult because of the human rights violations, the allegations but certainly the violations of human rights that have happened in Colombia.

On EFTA, the Liberal critic, the member for Kings—Hants, the member for Outremont, the critic for industry, the member for Halifax West and I worked on this issue. How do we know what the right thing is? We are concerned about the impact on shipbuilding with EFTA.

Our critic sat down with us and we asked what the real problem was? The real problem for shipbuilding is that there is no national strategy for shipbuilding and that is what Canada needs. That, above all else, is what we need. That is why a country like Norway, which was the concern in the EFTA deal, has supported, advanced and consistently invested in the shipbuilding industry. It has gotten to a point now where it presents a bit of an issue for us.

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My colleague from Halifax West, our industry critic, our free trade critic and I went to see our leader. He said, absolutely, he would commit the Liberal Party to having a national strategy on shipbuilding, that we would look at things like tariffs, the structured financing facility, those things that will make a difference to shipbuilding.

In the summer, just after the House adjourned in June, the four of us met with representatives of the shipbuilding industry, with companies, shipbuilding associations and workers. We came to an agreement that there were certain things we could do to advance shipbuilding, to make sure that everything is taken care of, that workers, management and shipbuilding associations can come together on a shipbuilding strategy that a Liberal government would facilitate, would lead, and that would make sure that shipbuilding retains its rightful place in the industrial structure of Canada.

•(1115)

On this deal, our critic and I had some discussions. Our critic for international trade and our critic for foreign affairs worked diligently on this file. They met with many Colombian stakeholders. They went down to Colombia, not with blinkers on but to study what is happening in that country. They met with trade representatives, think-tanks, unions, with President Uribe himself and with the UN High Commission and human rights representative in that country, to find out whether this deal would help or hurt.

Through all that work and the leadership that was shown by our critics on this file, I believe this free trade agreement can improve conditions in Colombia, conditions that have to some extent improved already, as the members for Niagara West—Glanbrook, Toronto Centre and others have pointed out.

We know we need to be vigilant. We know there is much work that has to be done. We know there are people who have been killed, people from labour unions, labour organizers and many others. The question is, how do we have a positive impact on that? How do we make sure that what we are doing is right, not only for ourselves but for other people with whom we share this world?

Many of the progressive forces in Colombia in fact look to Canada to assist and they believe this deal can actually enable them to make things better for the citizens of that country, to improve the lives of people who struggle in that country. They consulted extensively and with an open mind.

As we have heard as well, we are not the only progressive country in the world. Many of the countries with whom we do business, to whom we compare ourselves on human rights, labour conditions, fair wages and international development, are also negotiating with Colombia. Of course, in the United States, the Obama administration has signalled that it is perhaps readier to move now on this than it had been before, that this is important to the people of that country as well as the people of Colombia. So we have similar goals.

Generally, as a Liberal, I support freer trade. Among the organizations that are supporting this deal, I see Canada Pork International and the Cattlemen's Association. There are organizations in this country that, as my colleague from Malpeque has pointed out, need help. He called for an emergency debate earlier today on agriculture. These are organizations that can benefit as well.

We should be supporting freer trade. That is what we do as Liberals, but we always want to make sure that we see the whole picture and that we are not ignoring things that are going on in a country with which we choose to do business. We think, though, this deal can have a positive impact in reducing human rights abuses and helping to build and strengthen the social infrastructure in that country, strengthen the social foundations and actually make things better for the people who are suffering now.

At the end of the day, when we look at any kind of free trade bills, there are some in this House who will always oppose them. Perhaps there are some who always support them. I think it is important that we look at every bill, at the global picture as well as the national picture. We have to look at the people we are dealing with as well as the people in this country. We have to make sure that we are doing things for the right reasons, that we are protecting citizens wherever they live in this world, not just to the benefit of ourselves.

To support Canadian industry is not a bad thing. To support industry in other nations is not a bad thing. On balance and from the discussions we had, I have come to the very firm conclusion that this bill needs to go forward and it needs to go forward quickly.

•(1120)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am not sure if the Liberal member actually remembers that the steelworkers were here talking to them last spring, and they made a commitment then that they would support an independent, impartial and comprehensive human rights impact assessment before Canada considered an agreement with Colombia. That is not happening today, so perhaps he could answer the question with regard to whether he remembers that.

The other thing I want to know is whether he thinks these trade deals will change the culture in Colombia, because that is kind of what I got from his speech.

Perhaps we are thinking they might not kill as many trade unionists now, but that does not make it any better. It is like saying that someone who hits his wife is not hitting his wife as much now, but it is not better for her either.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Michael Savage: The home of Sidney Crosby, Madam Speaker.

The member forgets one simple fact, that all these abuses have happened without a free trade agreement with Canada. It is almost as if she is suggesting that all these abuses happened because Canada is considering a free trade agreement. In fact, there are conditions built into this bill that have the serious and significant potential to improve the situation in terms of human rights abuses in Colombia.

Government Orders

I have been in this House since 2004. I am not surprised that the NDP is opposed to this and I am not condemning members of that party for being opposed to it. I just do not think they have taken an open-minded approach to looking at this bill on balance and asking whether it can be good or bad for that country. That is what the NDP should do.

I think, on balance, the social infrastructure of the country that we are going to deal with can be made better by a deal with Canada. Average people in that country may be better off if Canada does not ignore them, does not shut them out, but in fact engages them in a free trade agreement.

That is my hope. That is my expectation. That is why I support the bill.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments of my colleague from Sidney Crosby's riding.

On a more serious note, I want to ask the member if he really believes that a country, a government, and dare I say, a regime that has significant numbers of documented deaths of trade unionists and other social activists should now try to sort out who should benefit from the domestic economy of that jurisdiction.

My colleague, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, mentioned earlier that while his colleagues were in Colombia, 600 people were slaughtered, connected to the government of that country.

Given the leadership of that country, given its track record so far in distributing the already limited wealth that the country generates, if we enter into a trade agreement that would actually give it even more money, do we think somehow it would distribute that more equitably?

Just last spring we had Yessika Hoyos Morales, the daughter of one of the trade unionists who was killed in Colombia, speak to us. Perhaps the member met with her as well. She asked us not to do this until we did the assessment, the analysis, until we are guaranteed and are sure that people will not continue to be killed, and perhaps in larger numbers as the pot becomes bigger, as the gold becomes more shiny for those who are in charge in that country, if that in fact will not be the record that we will be looking at as we reassess this in, say, five or ten years if we go ahead with this today.

• (1125)

Mr. Michael Savage: Madam Speaker, I did meet with the woman he spoke of. As I mentioned, I had concerns about this bill. I think it is incumbent upon members of Parliament to meet with as many people as they can. I do not dispute anything she said. However, we also have to take a look at these things from a balanced perspective and we have to make a decision.

According to Human Rights Watch:

[U]nder U.S. pressure related to the FTA, Colombia has started to take some positive steps on impunity for anti-union violence.

So I do not dispute anything that people have told me and I will meet with anybody who has a concern about any piece of legislation. However, it is our job as parliamentarians to make a decision on balance. On balance, it is my view that a free trade agreement

between Canada and Colombia will not only assist Canadian industry but will assist the people of Colombia to live more peaceful and prosperous lives.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[*English*]

I am glad to be able to join in this debate. It is a debate that says a lot about where we are going as a country, and frankly, this is not the direction that I believe most our constituents would want to be going in or supporting.

I know my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster has been quite active in his criticism of the many free trade agreements that the government has been pursuing, and rightly so. He has engaged a great many Canadians on this front. He can tell members that the response he has received from everyday Canadians is nothing like proponents of this deal would hope to see. It is a tidal wave of disapproval.

Although most Canadians are not concerned with the ins and outs of trade policy right now, due to being preoccupied with the economic crisis, when they are it is usually because of problems such as we have seen with our dysfunctional softwood lumber agreement and not trade with deals flying under the radar.

The problem with these kinds of agreements is that most people only become involved in the debate when it comes time to pick up the pieces, not when the nuts and bolts are being hammered out. They notice when a workplace closes because of our pursuit of a level playing field. They notice when they see the real incomes of the average family in decline as we compete with labour forces that are in disarray and at the mercy of corporate elite.

Trade unionists are watching this debate. They are aware that Colombia has one of the most dismal records for human rights in the western hemisphere. They know Colombia is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for trade unionists. They are asking us to step back from this agreement, yet we are not seeing that from the Conservatives and the Liberals.

Just last spring the United Steelworkers came to this place to try to get the members of the Liberal Party to recognize that the bad in this agreement far outweighs any good, to try to get them to recognize that President Uribe and paramilitary groups are trampling on the human rights of workers in Colombia.

They pointed out a side agreement that has a mechanism to invoke fines for the murder of trade unionists in Colombia. It is an occurrence that is that common.

They are asking the Liberal members to live up to the commitment they made in June 2008, which is what I mentioned a few minutes ago, that there be an independent, impartial and comprehensive human rights impact assessment before Canada considers an agreement with Colombia. Still the government, with the support of the Liberals, wants to fast-track this agreement.

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In the United States, a change of leadership has led to a change in thinking about this type of agreement. It is seen as a George Bush style of approach to trade. We saw Congress put a hold on the U.S.-Colombia free trade agreement last year, and President Barack Obama has said he will not pursue the agreement because of the human rights abuses.

That is a rare and candid admission from a country that is arguably the biggest proponent of free trade agreements. There, the thinking is changing, finally. They would like to see their trade partners make the necessary changes to protect human rights and the rights of trade unionists before they sign preferred trade partner agreements. That is exactly what the Bloc and the NDP are asking for.

They seem to be moving away from the belief that trade agreements are a panacea for the socio-economic woes of a country that will somehow cure all human rights abuses, end poverty, and protect the environment with the stroke of a pen. They are starting to reject the trickle-down model of economic and social development of Ronald Reagan and George Bush, and seem to be viewing trade deals as a reward for good behaviour.

The truth is that the United States is also becoming more protectionist about trade in general. We saw how the procurement policies for state government stimulus spending flew through loopholes in the North American Free Trade Agreement. That deal took much longer to hammer out than the one we are debating today and still has loopholes enough to leave Canada high and dry, time and time again.

Just ask our steel producers. They will tell you. Or better yet, come to my constituency and discuss Canada's miserable softwood lumber agreement with the United States. One would get a sobering picture of the real effect of bad trade agreements. One would see the real effect on communities, the uncertainty of mill closures and the migration of workers away from their roots and families.

• (1130)

If we go to towns like White River, Smooth Rock Falls, Opatatika, Hearst, Nairn Centre or Dubreuilville, we see how the people fear for the future of their community. It is the same all across northern Ontario. People feel betrayed by successive Liberal and Conservative governments that talk about the benefits of unbridled free trade, but only ever deliver the worst effects of the agreements on their communities.

We see loopholes that devastate our communities. The black liquor subsidy in the pulp and paper industry is a good example of this. Many companies in the United States have always used this byproduct of the pulp and paper making process as a fuel source. Now they are taking advantage of an American incentive to promote the use of alternative energy and are adding some gasoline to this mix. The end result is that by burning more gasoline than they were previously, they are now eligible for massive subsidies that certainly put a tilt in the playing field.

By the time the government recognized the severity of the subsidy and responded to this crisis, it was too late for some. The truth is it should not have been necessary if only our trade agreements had worked as we had been told they would, but they did not and they do not. How will this bill be any different? It has more to do with

investment opportunities for the privileged than it does with anything remotely approaching fair trade. It will legitimize a brutal regime and death squads in a country where 27 trade unionists have been murdered this year alone. It will exacerbate Colombia's poverty, which is directly linked to agricultural development.

In Colombia 22% of employment is agricultural. An end to tariffs on Canadian cereals, pork and beef will flood the market with cheap products and lead to thousands of lost jobs among the poorest Colombians. It will be the exact opposite of the fair trade deals in which we would like to see Canada enter.

What do we mean when we speak about fair trade? We mean new trade rules and agreements that promote the sustainable practices, domestic job creation and healthy working conditions, while allowing us to manage the supply of goods, promote democratic rights abroad and maintain democratic sovereignty at home. It all sounds very civilized. I think this is a model of trade that most Canadians can stand behind.

Fair trade is more environmentally sustainable. We know that given the choice, people will choose that every time. Fair trade policies protect the environment by encouraging the use of domestically and locally produced goods, less freight, less fuel, less carbon and promote environmentally conscious methods for producers who ship to Canada.

Free trade policies are just the opposite. Even those created with the environment in mind do little to stop multinational corporations from polluting. The environmental side agreement of NAFTA, for example, has proven largely unenforceable, particularly when compared with other protections for industry and investors.

Fair trade would encourage the growth of Canadian jobs. We would see more jobs and better jobs. Fair competition rules and tougher labour standards would put Canadian industries on a truly level playing field with our trading partners and slow the international race to the bottom that has resulted in the loss of Canadian manufacturing jobs. We are not adverse to competition. We are confident we can compete under fair trade regulations.

Free trade rules, on the other hand, have hurt Canadian job quality. Since 1989, most Canadian families have seen a decline in real incomes. That is 20 years of hurt. We warned about it then and we are telling everyone about it now. We are trying to avoid the mistakes of the past.

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Fair trade would protect labour rights by fostering the growth of workers' co-operatives and labour unions. Fair trade policies, which favour co-ops, unions and equitable pricing, will protect workers in the developing world who might otherwise be exploited. As we see in Colombia, workers are being exploited, or worse.

●(1135)

Fair trade would take away reasons for Canadian producers to export jobs. They would have to operate under the same rules as they do in Canada. There would be no significant difference for those who choose to produce offshore.

This is why we cannot support this free trade agreement—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order please. The hon. member may have time to complete her comments in questions and comments.

The hon. member for Yukon.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I invite the member to finish what she was going to say as part of her answer.

The member mentioned the effect of the softwood lumber agreement on communities in her constituency. Could she elaborate on exactly what the effect of that agreement is on some of her communities and give us more specifics?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Madam Speaker, I do not think this will be new news to anyone, but many of my communities have been quite devastated.

Opatatika, Smooth Rock Falls and White River were one industry towns. Most of those communities are one industry towns. As soon as that closed down, the wood allocation still was allowed to go elsewhere, which has really put these communities in a bind.

We have seen houses for sale for \$10,000. People have lost their jobs. Aside from losing their jobs, they have lost their houses as well. It is a shame.

With the tax base these communities get, they do not even know whether they will continue to survive.

On that note, fair trade rules would not only protect human rights across the globe but would protect jobs in Canada as well.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member opposite gave an eloquent speech. I spent three days in her riding over the summer, visiting Sudbury, Hearst and Timmins. The member commented that there was not much support there for some of the measures we had undertaken as a government to help that community, and I disagree entirely. A number of people were very thankful for many of the measures we put in place during this economic recession.

Could the member opposite perhaps touch on the fact that I met with a number of people who thanked us for the \$4 million that was provided to a cultural theatre in Hearst? I have received a number of "thank yous" for a number of other measures that have come to those areas. They are suffering and we acknowledge that.

I would like the member to take this opportunity to also acknowledge the heartfelt thanks coming from those community

members to the Government of Canada for the job we are doing to try to protect their interests during this global recession.

●(1140)

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Madam Speaker, I am glad the member was able to see the devastation across my riding with regard to some of these small communities.

I am sure the community members and leaders are very thankful for the tax dollars the government has put back into their community, because, all in all, it is their tax dollars. I do not consider them as gifts from the government. We need to give them back their dollars.

The issue at hand is with regard to the softwood lumber industry and the free trade agreement that was put in place, which was not a good thing for my communities for the most part.

As the member will note, one of the biggest demand is the access to reasonable credit. This is what many of my communities still need in order to move forward.

The aspect of the free trade agreement certainly has had a negative impact on my communities. I hope we are going to see more dollars filtering in and the FedNor dollars that these communities have asked for will stop being held up in the minister's office and be put back into the agency itself in order to move those dollars more quickly into the communities.

An aboriginal community has advised me that it is still waiting to hear about the \$20,000 FedNor request, which is still sitting on the minister's desk. The members of that community have already had their conference and they still do not know if they are going to get their dollars. Shame on the minister on that part.

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Madam Speaker, today we discuss a matter that not only involves Canada's economic and trade policy with Colombia, but is also a general statement of our general orientation of our general foreign policy.

This government has looked out to the world. We are not a government whose foreign policy is inward looking. We are a government that wants to engage and to reach out, to follow-up on the proud Canadian history of reaching out to the entire world. This is entirely appropriate since Canada is made up of individuals and families. Our history comes from all over the world. The Canada-Colombia free trade agreement is very much a part of that history. It is part of our government's willingness to engage and to reach out.

Under this government, Canada has become, and will continue into the future to be, a large player on the international stage. We do not do that by just reaching out to the high profile missions around the world such as Afghanistan and some of the UN peacekeeping missions. We do that by engaging the entire world, including places such as Latin America, Colombia, Peru, Panama, places where we are reaching out to engage in free trade, to engage with these countries to build Canada's economy, to build their economy, to build closer ties on an economic and cultural basis.

It is entirely appropriate that this government and all Canadian governments continue to build on free trade agreements and to engage in free trade throughout the world.

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Canada's history is fundamentally that of a trading nation. We think of the schooners, like the *Bluenose* from Nova Scotia, that traded with the Caribbean, along the coasts of the Americas and my region of western Canada, the grain basket of the continent. We reach out and we trade with the whole world.

Canadian wheat is well known around the world as are our lumber and our mineral exports. The whole reason that Canada was settled had to do with trade, the fur trade, the Hudson's Bay Company, the courier du bois, the northwesterners. We are a country that was fundamentally built on trade.

To continue our success, to continue our history of prosperity, we need to continue that history of trade. We need to continue that pattern. We need to continue it wherever we go in the world.

When we look at the fundamentals of the trade deal with Colombia, we see opportunities for Canada. Again, concentrating on my region, we can look at some of the agriculture products for which Colombia is looking to Canada. Saskatchewan pulse growers have been very successful marketing to Colombia and they are looking forward to greater success.

One of the things that Colombians are most looking for and reaching out to Canada for is our agriculture technology for its pork industry, which it is looking to expand. Colombia is reaching out for Canada's agriculture technology for its beef and cattle producers. It is looking to have secure Canadian breeding and technology to expand its industries.

We look at the opportunities for Canadian natural resource producers, and not only the mining companies that go there, extract the minerals and bring the profits to Canada after putting in resources, investment and creating jobs down there.

We are also looking to take our natural gas and oil technology to Colombia because Canada has some of the greatest technology in the whole world.

This agreement is not only fundamentally good for Canada, but it is fundamentally good for Colombia. Free trade in and of itself is good everywhere, all the time. It has been an economic principle established throughout history.

As Europe and the broader world began to pull back from mercantilism and progressed onward to capitalism and free trade, we saw the unprecedented growth of prosperity. The industrial revolution was allowed to flourish.

Colombia is looking forward to expanding its exports to Canada. While currently Colombia concentrates on such products as coal and fresh cut flowers, and we all know about Colombian coffee, there are many other areas where the Colombian government and the Colombian people and businesses are looking forward to expanding.

Colombians are particularly looking forward to Canadian investment. They are looking to expand their biofuel industry and other industries that require the ingenuity and technology from other countries. Colombia is looking to do this because it desires a better economy, a better society for its people.

● (1145)

Some members of the House have been criticizing the agreement because of what it will do to the Colombian people, but they should look at some of the elements of the agreement. Colombia has to demonstrate to Canada and improve in certain areas, and there are agreements within the agreement on free association, collective bargaining, labour and labour rights, important things to help raise the standards for the Colombian people.

It should be stated these are not things that are being imposed from the outside. These are things that Colombia itself wants to do. Colombia knows it has had a challenging history and knows it needs to demonstrate to the rest of the world that it is important for Colombians to change perceptions of their country.

Let me deal with some of the questions and comments that have come from the opposition members who are opposed to this, and try to understand their logic and demonstrate why it is not appropriate in this debate. Essentially they are saying that we should not go forward with this agreement because President Uribe and his regime have been opposed to supporting the increase of human rights.

When we look at the statistics and the trend regarding murders, kidnappings and things that have been going on in Colombia, we see the trend is in a positive direction. The government has been doing its best to curb the violence, to solve the civil war. We should also note that it is in the government's and the president's interest to make this agreement work, to have human rights be more successful, because this is an agreement that is not only important for Colombia's relationship with Canada, but it is important for Colombia's relationship with the entire world. This agreement will demonstrate, particularly to the United States, that Colombia has made progress in areas in which it has been criticized. This is important to Colombians for what they can achieve not just with us but with the broader world. Therefore, they are motivated to continue the successes of the last few years.

It should also be remembered that this agreement is not merely with a president who, even if he is re-elected next year as the polls show is very possible, will move on in another five years. This is an agreement that has the support of Colombia's lower house and its senate. It is supported by members of different political parties and, as has been noted here, it is also supported by the private sector trade unions.

Considering the debate in this House has been about protection of labour rights, the protection of union leaders, it is important to note that private sector unions in Colombia have, by and large, been supportive of it.

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We should also note that the logic of not pursuing a trade deal because of certain human rights criticisms does not hold, based on history or behaviour, to other nations. The question is not so much: Is everything perfect in a country? We know everything is not perfect in Canada. We know everything is not perfect with many of our trade partners. The question fundamentally should be the direction and desire of the people and the government of the country. The direction and desire of the people of Colombia is to improve their human rights situation, to improve their labour standards to make a better, more peaceful, more prosperous country.

If we applied the same rigorous standard of perfection to Canada, in Canada's history, no one would have had a trade deal with Canada. We have been a country that has been at the forefront of human rights, reaching out to the rest of the world, looking forward to improve and make our own country a better place. But in Canadian history, we have not been perfect; we know that and we understand that. If we desire and demand perfection from other countries, we are effectively saying we are hypocritical in not demanding other countries asking for it from us.

I ask hon. members of the House to support the agreement because it is good for Canada. It will increase our trade. It will increase our prosperity. We ask hon. members to support it because it is good for the people of Colombia. It will increase their trade and their prosperity. If we allow the perfect to be the opponent of the good, we will never progress.

This is an agreement which stands on its own merits. It stands in historical Canadian tradition of promoting human rights, promoting democracy and promoting trade. I am very proud to support it. I am very proud that my government has reached out to enter into this agreement with Colombia. I will be proud to vote for this agreement when it comes to a final vote.

• (1150)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member mentioned the pride Canada has in its expertise at shipping grain around the world. That is true at the moment, but it is ironic that he would make that point on a day when the Conservatives have put terribly flawed changes to the Canada Grain Act on today's order paper for debate. The changes would reduce inspections and would allow things to get through, which would cause scandals in our grain industry that could affect the great reputation we have around the world. Every member of Parliament, except the Conservatives, has recognized this. There is a hoist motion on this bill because it is such a terrible bill. We have had the terrible experience of the Conservatives' policy of suggesting reduction in inspectors on the floors of meat-packing companies. We know the problem we had with the listeriosis crisis, when Canadians actually died.

I would hope the member would at least stand up in his caucus if he cannot do it publicly and decry that bill. It would reduce inspections on grain and threaten that tremendous reputation we have around the world for our wheat.

Mr. Brad Trost: Madam Speaker, I am not sure what my hon. colleague's question has to do with the debate about Colombia, but let me respond as someone who is proudly the son, grandson and great-grandson of western Canadian grain farmers and as someone who himself has farmed.

I am very proud to support what the government is doing when it comes to changes to the Canadian Grain Commission and its position on the Wheat Board. The member should know that industry tends to be supportive of these changes. The industry is also very aware that the quality of Canadian grain is one of our greatest selling points and it will do nothing to jeopardize the quality or reputation of our grains.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciated the member's comments and the opportunity to have this very important debate here in the House.

I would ask the member if he does not agree with the analysis of what has happened in the last year not only in Canada but worldwide in terms of the economic crisis. Was it not driven primarily by unregulated, unfettered activity by a market that was totally out of control and that nobody seemed able to manage?

We are still trying to work our way through it and come to some understanding of what we need to put in place and how we need to change the way we do business in this country. Members of Parliament have responsibility for their constituents, their constituents' jobs and small companies, and their communities. We still do not completely understand how free trade, which is another term for unfettered, unregulated markets, was the cause of the difficulty we are in now. We have still not figured out how to change that.

Why would the government enter holus-bolus into yet another free trade agreement that we do not quite understand in terms of its impact on Canada, never mind the impact that we know it will have on the people of Colombia?

• (1155)

Mr. Brad Trost: Madam Speaker, my speech on Colombia must have been pretty good, since I am not receiving too many questions on it. The questions seem to be on other matters.

The main premise of the hon. member's question was that free enterprise and free trade caused the economic crisis around the world last year. I would beg to differ. I would say that the American housing sector had been essentially socialized through Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, government institutions and distortions through the U.S. tax system, which instead of being free market ended up subsidizing the building of homes.

What the United States engaged in was not socialism for the poor, but socialism for the rich, and it ultimately came back to haunt the Americans. Again, without those massive government interferences and various other aspects engaged in by U.S. political leadership, I do not know if we would have seen the bubble and the collapse in the United States that affected other parts of the world. I fail to see how free trade agreements in any way caused what happened last year.

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[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to start by welcoming my constituents from the wonderful riding of Laval. They will note that, despite all the rumours circulating, all the MPs in the House of Commons and Parliament are continuing to do their work and will do so until the government falls.

What is most surprising to me about today's discussion on this free trade agreement is that, on the one hand, there seems to be the belief that this government, which has never recognized or respected the rights of people from our own country, the rights of Canadians and Quebeckers who go abroad and find themselves in dangerous situations, will now ensure that the rights of Colombians are respected simply by signing a free trade agreement with them.

The Bloc Québécois is not against free trade agreements or international trade. However, we are against anything that could hurt or be harmful to vulnerable people. We have seen this too often in the past. The fact that the government did not bother to wait for the committee to draft and table its report is even more hurtful and shows again the government's lack of respect in this matter. This is such an obvious lack of respect that it is a wonder my Liberal Party colleagues can nevertheless support sending this bill to committee. It is evident that there is no way of ensuring respect for the rights of Colombians.

This is a free trade agreement in which there is no guarantee for the people who are going to be displaced and who will have to move elsewhere. Notwithstanding the comments of the hon. member earlier, since 2007 there has been an increase in the number of murders and assassinations in Colombia. When I talk about assassinations, I am referring to political murders. There has been an increase in the movement of people who must leave their land because it is too dangerous for them to live there. These are small mine owners who are being displaced by large mining companies, or small-scale farmers who are being displaced by large agribusinesses. When these people are displaced, they move to large cities, such as Bogota for example. We know what happens in big cities when new people arrive with no way to make a living. People find themselves living in shantytowns, as is the case in Brazil, where such slums are a common occurrence and where people are not living, but surviving.

I do not think that when we sign a free trade agreement, these are the results we want to achieve through it. I wonder how one could possibly believe that these mining companies would take it upon themselves to maintain and respect the human rights of Colombians, when they are not subject to any regulations and when nothing forces them to do so.

Every year, for the past number of years, officials from Development and Peace have come to see us to tell us and show us what is already happening with mining companies in other countries. We see that human rights are also being violated in these other countries. How can we believe that these companies will suddenly endorse more progressive and open social values and ensure that the people they are going to displace will at least be relocated to areas where they can live decently? I do not believe that is the case. I do not believe in the good intentions of those businesses, which stand to make billions of dollars.

● (1200)

Colombia has very rich soil. It has a lot of ore. It also has emerald mines. I know that women love emeralds. That country has very rich soil that can generate billions of dollars in profits annually. The only way to stop and to sanction mining companies is to impose on them fines of up to \$15 million annually for all offences.

What does \$15 million mean when one can get billions of dollars? Absolutely nothing. That amount is meaningless on such a large scale.

If we had really wanted to ensure the whole thing would be done in a fair and equitable fashion, first, we would have waited for the report to be tabled. Second, we would have listened carefully to the Colombians who came to meet with us. Last spring, I met with five Colombian women who urged us not to ratify this free trade agreement.

We should, at the very least, have listened to their concerns, to their pleas, and thus realized that we are actually abusing a whole segment of Colombia's population in order to give a few members of the elite class something they can boast about, namely to have succeeded in reaching an agreement with Canada. It is an agreement that gives more to them than to Colombia's population, even though they have not done anything to deserve it.

Hon. members mentioned President Uribe, who was running again. He would certainly like to run *ad infinitum*. That does not mean he will necessarily succeed, but if he does unfortunately, what will be the effect on human rights? How can we possibly think there will be more respect for them? I do not think so. As soon as someone starts getting ideas about being a dictator, as this man is apparently doing, the only possible conclusion is that there will be no respect or support for human rights and that nothing will be done to lend credibility to the organizations that fight for them.

Someone said earlier there were reports from reliable, credible organizations that Colombia was on the right track and had made progress. That depends, though, on the organizations we listen to. There are organizations as well on the other side that fight for human rights. Five in particular are telling us that this is not true and that there are actually more and more acts of violence against union organizers, more and more displacements to the cities, more and more marginalized people and more and more disappearances.

If we want to compare these two assessments, we should give greater credibility to the most vulnerable people and be very demanding in what we require when we sign a free trade agreement.

We saw what happened with softwood lumber. If we are negligent and insufficiently attentive about the way these free trade agreements are phrased, we will discover that the results are not necessarily what we expected.

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If the government had really wanted to show some respect for the people of Colombia, for Parliament and for the parliamentarians here who worked hard and were exemplary committee members, it would at least have waited until the report was tabled and its recommendations could be considered.

That was not done. I am hardly surprised to see this in a government that does not care about women's rights here in Canada and the rights of Canadian soldiers. We saw veterans this morning whose means of subsistence had been cut. This is also a government that does not care about the rights of the first nations.

• (1205)

How could a government that acts in this way toward its own citizens be expected to act differently toward the citizens of another country for which it has no respect?

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Bloc member for her speech. She certainly made the point that a free trade agreement with Colombia should not move forward, especially because of the atrocities being committed there against unionized workers.

A number of accusations have been made against the Colombian government, including accusations of murder, which is a serious problem and cause for concern. Over the past 10 years, 60% of unionized workers have been killed. I can understand the concern she expressed in her speech.

Should we really turn our backs on these people? These are people who are living in poverty. Should we sign a free trade agreement or should we first protect human rights?

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, my answer is simple. We must always consider human rights before profits.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of her speech I thought the member mentioned working against problems of safety in other countries. I think she meant that if Canadians travel there. Of course, there is the totally dismal and unacceptable record of the government of treating Canadians differently and not protecting them when they go to other countries.

I have a lot of families in my riding with children, teenagers or young adults who travel overseas. To be afraid that they will not be treated equally by the government if they get in trouble is certainly a big concern for my party. I think it is also a concern for the member but I would ask her to elaborate.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Yukon for his question. He is a new father, so he knows how important it is to care for the people we love.

The people who are being abandoned by the Canadian government or whose rights are being violated in other countries also have people who love them. They have also left behind families, people who love them, people who miss them, people who would like to be quickly reunited with them, but they are in other countries and are not able to return, or must wait a very long time before they are able to return.

Let us take for example the citizen who was waiting in an embassy for years, and who was billed for the food he ate. I thought it was disgusting that a government would bill someone for food when he is not there of his own free will, but is being forced to stay at the embassy before being sent home.

I understand my colleague's concerns, and I share them.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Mauricio Vásquez was a teacher and union activist in Colombia who was killed. It is very disturbing that it is not just the hard industry union activists that are being killed in Colombia, it is civil society like teachers.

Does it deepen my colleague's concerns when civil society, like nurses and teachers who organize for public services, are assassinated in Colombia.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

We definitely have good reason to worry about the people of Colombian civil society, considering the climate of terror and fear that has reigned in that country for quite some time. The drug trade is very lucrative in Colombia, and as we know, drug lords will do just about anything to become more powerful.

We know, or at least we think, that paramilitary groups may be affiliated with the current government.

So, yes, I am worried. All those who have died thought they had the right to live and that they had—

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Oakville.

[*English*]

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support this important initiative of free trade with our South American neighbours, the people of Colombia, in Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, and the measures and agreements on the environment and labour co-operation that are part of that agreement.

Canada has always been a trading nation, and a great portion of our economy and wealth historically came from selling goods that are mined, sourced and manufactured in Canada. As far back as the Hudson's Bay company, our historical wealth, which began hundreds of years ago with fish and furs, developed into manufactured goods and a high-tech industry. Canada could always produce more than our people need, because we have the resources and because Canadians are an industrious people.

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I think of Daniel Massey, who in 1850 founded the Massey farm implement company in Newcastle, Ontario, and his son Hart, my mother's great-grandfather, a brilliant businessman who took over the family business. Having developed the most advanced farm machinery in the world, for example reapers and threshers that were sold all over Canada, Massey Manufacturing took on the world and won. It became one of the world's largest farm implement companies, and it continued to grow.

Hart Massey was one of the original masters of the corporate takeover. He managed to absorb the Ferguson Tractor Company and later Harris manufacturing company to create the world's largest farm implement company, Massey Harris.

This was accomplished despite the tariffs that existed. One can only imagine how much further Massey Harris might have gone had there been true free trade, as will be accomplished in this agreement.

I also think about one of Canada's leading companies today, Research In Motion, which makes the BlackBerry's that are so ubiquitous on Parliament Hill and business worldwide, a current example of how Canadian entrepreneurs, given a level playing field, can take on the world and win. Those entrepreneurs have always provided thousands of jobs in Canada, and increasingly, value-added high-tech jobs, the jobs of the future.

In so many cases, such as our high-tech industry, software industry and even in mining and resources, it is important for governments to sometimes get out of the way of our most industrious and creative citizens by lowering barriers that are not benefiting the economies of nations with which it should be trading more.

This agreement opens the door, without trade barriers, to Canadian wheat, paper products, mining, oil and gas, engineering and information technology. I think of two of the world's largest engineering firms with head offices in my riding of Oakville: Amec and Acres International. They are already world-beaters. They already engineer projects all over the world, but they will have better access to Colombian business as we move forward and deepen our presence in Latin America.

Trade creates new jobs and new wealth. All one has to do is look at Ontario's auto pact, which has existed since the 1960s. It is one of our earliest free trade agreements. In my riding of Oakville, we make four Ford models currently, including the Ford Edge. Eighty per cent of the cars and sixty per cent of the auto parts manufactured in Ontario are sold in the United States. Thousands of jobs in Ontario depend upon car and car parts sold in the U.S. The auto industry knows what we know, that Canadian workers are reliable, hard-working, well-educated, healthy and productive.

This industry is totally integrated. I have a constituent in Oakville who runs a plant in Brantford, Ontario. They make engine manifolds that go to plants in the United States and Mexico. They are installed on the engines and come back to Oshawa and other parts of Canada where they are installed in cars that are then resold in the United States.

This is how far a free trade agreement can integrate an industry and create wealth. That is why one out of four jobs in Canada today comes from free trade. Canada has prospered mightily from free trade.

Our largest trading partner, the U.S., has been hit hard by this recession. Its debt-to-GDP ratio is more than double that of ours. Many of its financial institutions have failed. The sales of our producers who sell to the U.S. are down. The place that was our greatest source of trading wealth and jobs has now become weaker.

However, we have been overdependent on the U.S. market for years. The U.S. economy will recover, as will ours, but I have always wondered why the previous government, in 13 years, did not pursue more free trade agreements to lower that dependency on our American neighbours.

● (1215)

We now have a leader with a long-term vision for Canada, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, and a government that is doing that, working with our democratic allies to open doors —

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would remind the hon. member for Oakville to refrain from using proper names of colleagues; it is just ridings or titles.

Mr. Terence Young: Mr. Speaker, in November the Prime Minister went to Peru to pursue a free trade agreement with the Peruvians, and we are currently debating free trade with Peru.

We have also concluded a free trade agreement with Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein. Canadian products will now go into these countries without tariff penalties. Lower prices will mean more sales in those countries.

If our American friends are not in a position to buy Canadian goods, for any reason, then perhaps people in Europe or South America will.

The most exciting potential is with the European Union, where there are 27 countries. This government is moving towards a formal negotiation with all of Europe, the world's second largest economy, at over a trillion dollars. With such a trading partner the dependence we have had on trade in the U.S. market will diminish. If the U.S. economy weakens, for any reason, as it has during this worldwide recession—in fact it started in the United States—we will have other avenues for trade. Canada will become more independent by trading with more partners.

There are serious concerns over the human rights record in Colombia, yet its current administration has shown it wants to improve human rights. As people's lives become better in Colombia, that administration will become more stable and it will have the time it needs to improve human rights. For example, it has signed the accord to follow the ILO, International Labour Organization, rules, regulations and obligations regarding trade and labour, as Canada already does. There are sanctions for countries that do not follow these accords.

Perhaps most important, union leaders in Colombia have said that they support this agreement. They have said this agreement would improve the labour situation in Colombia. Who would know better than they?

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The most important principle is that people's lives in Colombia and Canada improve over time. By doing business with Colombia, we have good reason to believe they will.

Free trade creates prosperity and jobs. Ongoing trade dialogue and interaction would expose what is best about Canada to the people of Colombia who are in positions of influence in their society. It will take time. However, the people in Canada and Colombia who have ideas and are inventive and produce excellent goods would all benefit from this agreement, as would the people who work in their plants and factories.

Canadian companies will continue to lead the world. I think of Fifth Light Technology, in Oakville, where a brilliant engineer has developed a ballast for fluorescent bulbs and they can dim bulbs by operating computer-based technology in a factory in their large building. They are able to reduce the lighting costs in large facilities by up to 70%. That is conserving energy.

If this technology were to be put in every commercial building, in Ontario, for example, the owners of the company feel we would need one less nuclear reactor.

This company is a world leader. This is the kind of company that could take its technology to Colombia or Europe or anywhere else in the world and be ahead of everyone else, while creating jobs here in Canada.

This is an example of our future as a trading nation, taking what we do best in the world while engaging our trading partners in human rights and principles.

• (1220)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to thank the member for Oakville for his speech when he particularly mentioned that one out of the four jobs are somewhere else.

In fact I was also troubled when he mentioned that the Prime Minister, his leader, had vision when it comes to creating opportunities for engineers. That is not what we are hearing from business leaders.

Last week, our leader, the leader of the official opposition, met with the business people who deal with China and India. I can tell the member that every single one of them said the Prime Minister has failed time and again when it comes to dealing with the Asia-Pacific Rim.

Why has the leader of the member's party not made a single trip to those two emerging world powers, which are where the opportunities for Canadians lie?

Mr. Terence Young: Mr. Speaker, I understand the Prime Minister is planning a trip to China in the near future. This government understands that China is a tremendous potential trading partner. We do business in China already.

However, there always has to be a balance, as our friends in the NDP have talked about today, between human rights and business. I was very proud when the Prime Minister stood up for Huseyinca Celil, a Canadian citizen who was imprisoned without apparent reason in China. In any discussion we have on trade, with any

trading partner, there has to be an open dialogue and discussion about human rights at the same time.

My colleagues on the Liberal side of the floor have talked about human rights as well, so I think they would be pleased with that. There is always a balance between trying to improve other countries' economies and trying to bring countries that do not benefit from the rights that we do into a better position on human rights.

No one thinks there are no injustices in Colombia, for example; there are injustices in every country. But if Canada wants to influence events, the government of Colombia has said it will abide by international labour agreements and pursue better human rights.

We feel, and I think experience shows, that countries are more likely to listen to other countries and institutions if their economy has become at least partially dependent on trading with those countries.

• (1225)

The Deputy Speaker: I am going to stop the hon. member there. I know there are other members who would like to ask a question.

The hon. member for Windsor West.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was a little surprised by the description of the auto industry by the member for Oakville. We need to clarify something important. The auto pact that Canada signed with the United States was actually destroyed by our free trade agreement with the United States, and Canada has slipped from fourth in world assembly to tenth. Subsequently we have lost further market share. There is an important distinction to recognize here.

With respect to the member's reference about the jobs to Mexico, they used to be done in Canada. The member might want to talk to the member for Chatham-Kent—Essex about the Navistar international truck plant in his riding, which is closing because the work has been moved to Texas. Even the government is actually procuring a truck deal for \$200 million. It decided to allow that to be done in Texas instead of Chatham, sending those workers home. On top of that, some of that work has been moved to Mexico as well. I think that is important.

What does the member believe is going to hold Colombia to account when we have had another 27 union activists killed there, civil society members including teachers, and after we sign this deal we will have no stick to put pressure on the Colombian government for reform?

Mr. Terence Young: Mr. Speaker, the simple question is what would happen if our trading partners do not agree and abide by their agreements. It is very important to note the worst case scenario. The annex of the parallel agreement on labour cooperation sets out a maximum fine of \$15 million for failing to respect the obligations set out in the agreement, but I believe it is moral persuasion that will work. We have an ongoing relationship with Colombia that we are working on and which this agreement will help to establish. We will have a presence in that country. That is the best way to assess, on a day-to-day basis, the human rights reality in that country.

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We can monitor sections 1603 and 1604 of the agreement, which refers to the United Nations universal declaration of human rights and its labour standards. That covers the right to association, free collective bargaining, and rights concerning the health and safety of all workers in the workplace. In fact, this agreement enforces two high standards. Colombia signed a free trade agreement and it is willing to demonstrate it will maintain those standards.

We are happy to support this agreement to make that happen.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to speak to Bill C-23, a bill that has taken on great importance here in Parliament this week. In many respects, it is a bill that announces to the Canadian people that the most unlikely of alliances may yet come into being. The Conservatives and the NDP are twisting themselves in knots trying to put the best spin on all their flipping and flopping.

Let us talk about the text itself. This bill has its beginnings in the summit meeting that occurred last November in Lima. At that time, the Prime Minister said "...free and open markets are the best way to ensure the global economy can quickly rebound".

Regardless of what has happened between November and now, I and my colleagues would like to take the Prime Minister at his word and believe that he meant what he said back then. However, for those of us who have been following the government's approach to Asian markets over the last three long years, it could only be seen as an eleventh hour conversion. If the Prime Minister had always believed what he said in Lima, the last three years would have been very different. He would have been aware of other points of focus in international trade, other borders beyond Colombia and the Americas.

This was an issue earlier this month when my leader, the Leader of the Opposition, and I sat down with some of our key stakeholders in the Pacific Rim export markets. The fact is that the last time there was any significant trade negotiations with an Asian country was back in 2001.

In all this time, three governments have completed six free trade agreements with countries in the Americas. These deals were structured much like this one. However, with a little research, we soon discover that the Americas account for only 11% of the world's GDP growth, while Asia accounts for 42% at 2008 purchasing power parity rates. To make things worse, almost twice as many Canadians are from Asia as are from the Americas. Our focus is misplaced considering the strength of our cultural ties.

In economic times like these, we cannot help wondering how much better positioned Canada would be if we had actually engaged in Asian markets over the last three years, never mind the Americas.

Perhaps the Prime Minister was afraid that the more time he spent in Asia he would become less Canadian or maybe someone would run ads saying that he was just visiting his own country.

However, perhaps I should just keep the focus on the bright side. Here we are and the government is doing something at least to open up Canada's markets to the world. If doing something means Colombia, let us get down to it and do it right.

Colombia needs to engage with us. The past 40 years of its history tells of illegal drugs fuelling paramilitary groups in one of the most destructive conflicts in the hemisphere. The conflict caused massive displacements, murders and human rights violations. No member of this House is under any illusion about Colombia's past. Our task now is to shape its future.

• (1230)

Now we see that this the very issue of human rights abuses, the one that Conservatives used to explain their failure on the China file, is not the sticking point it once was. With this Colombia agreement now a part of a confidence vote, it is no longer an issue with our New Democratic friends either. This is quite a flip-flop for them, needless to say.

Just this May, they were saying, "The NDP is standing on the side of millions of Canadians who oppose murder, torture and human rights abuses. We oppose the blood that is on this agreement".

I guess those millions will hear a different story from them in the coming months or coming days.

They also claim that this deal makes a mockery of human rights. For members of the NDP, I guess it is a better mockery of human rights than the mockery they make of Parliament, lying in bed with the Conservatives at the first opportunity. So much for empty rhetoric. Let us look at the facts.

As a member of the international trade committee, I visited Colombia last year with my colleagues to talk to the people of Colombia. We heard from experts, businesses, NGOs, trade unions and officials. Our committee found that there has been progress in Colombia since President Uribe was elected in 2002: violence and murders are down 50%, kidnappings are down 90%; union member killings are down 70%; displacements are down 75%; tens of thousands are being reincorporated into civil society from demobilized paramilitary groups; 92% of children are in primary school; and 30,000 hectares have been reforested. However, against this progress, paramilitary groups continue to violate human rights, environmental programs lack adequate resources and corruption remains a major problem.

We must ask ourselves how we can build on our progress and engage Colombia on human rights. The Liberal Party has always believed that economic engagement helps build Canadian influence on human rights. People on the ground in Colombia agree.

The United Nations told us in Bogota that Canada can use the agreement to promote dialogue and improve accountability on human rights. Human rights activists in Colombia told the committee that trade agreements are an effective means to pressure Colombia to live up to its international human rights obligations.

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To sum up, the Conservative government is squandering the tremendous potential of the Asian market and spending all its time and resources in the Americas.

It is clear that Saskatchewan is the only province in Canada that had a surplus budget last year. The success story is that it is the only province that deals with other countries besides the Americas and that is where its goods and commodities are going. We should all be learning from that province.

With this deal, Canada must support Colombia's efforts to tackle the drug trade, security and corruption. Let us make sure of it.

• (1235)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I tend to agree with some of what the member has indicated about progressing with free trade in Colombia to address some of these humanitarian issues. However, I take issue with some of the comments made with regard to our attempts to negotiate free trade agreements with India, China and so on.

I have a question for the member. I would like him to take this opportunity to explain and perhaps defend his Liberal Party's position for 13 years where it was only able to negotiate a paltry three free trade agreements, when in four years our Conservative government has "opened doors to Canadian businesses by signing new free trade agreements with Colombia, Peru, Jordan, Panama, the European Free Trade Association states such as Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein". We have opened eight trading offices in India and are about to open six trading offices in China.

I would like to give the member the opportunity to defend the paltry three free trade agreements that were done in 13 years compared to our Conservative record, which stands up very well to whatever it is that he is going to defend.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that it was the Liberal Party that started the talks on free trade with the Americas.

The member can go to British Columbia or travel across Canada and business leaders will tell her that it was a Liberal prime minister, the Right Hon. Jean Chrétien, who took business leaders to those countries to pursue business relationships. It is all about forming relationships.

In the last three long years, the member's leader and Prime Minister of this country has poked China's eye. He has made no positive contribution to develop a relationship. Relationships develop trade and that is where the Prime Minister is lagging.

Instead of asking me this question, the member should be going to her leader and telling him to make progress on that file.

• (1240)

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the two parties are fighting over who are the better free traders in the country and in our history, when any analysis of the difficult economy we are in will say, and everyone is agreeing, that it is unfettered, unregulated free trade globally driven by greed that has caused the difficulty we are experiencing now.

The government should be engaged in how we should restructure our economy to focus on the domestic needs of Canadians. Perhaps we should be backing away from this discussion about free trade, getting ourselves organized and encouraging other countries to do the same so we can right this ship and move forward with some confidence so that at the end of the day, no matter what we do, everybody will benefit.

I remember growing up in the little town of Wawa where 1,200 people mined ore and sent it to Sault Ste. Marie where 12,000 people turned it into steel and sent it out to communities across this country where hundreds of thousands of people made buses, cars and boats. It was the advent of free trade that brought a collapse to all of those communities and has given what we see today, which is a very difficult circumstance for many working men and women across this country—

The Deputy Speaker: I will have to stop the hon. member there so the member for Newton—North Delta has time to respond.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, this is not about which party is the leader on free trade. If we look at history, Canada has always been a trading nation. If we look at Canada's economic future, it lies in Asia. If we look at where the positive growth is, it is only in China and India. Those are the two emerging economic powers in the world that we need to—

The Deputy Speaker: We will have to move on with debate.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Abbotsford.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as you know, Canada is one of the great trading nations of the world. For many, many years we as a country have relied on trade to provide us with prosperity and to provide us with a standard of living which is the envy of the rest of the world. During these challenging economic times Canada has to look at how we do business going forward.

Presently, 75% of our trade is with the United States. That is good news, but it is also bad news. By having 75% of our trade with one country we become very dependent on that country's economy. During this recession, we have noticed that when the United States is having serious economic problems, we are feeling the impact of that.

Some time ago the World Trade Organization negotiations for a global agreement on trade fell apart. This provided a new opportunity for Canada to enter into bilateral trade relationships with countries around the world. Not only will these relationships strengthen our economy, but we in turn can have an influence and an impact on other countries that are perhaps developing. We can help them enhance their prosperity.

To that end, our Conservative government has been very aggressive in pursuing bilateral free trade agreements with countries around the world. For example, in the last four years our government has opened doors to Canadian businesses by signing free trade agreements with Colombia, which is the agreement we are debating today, and with Peru, Jordan, Panama, and the European Free Trade Association, which covers the countries of Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein. But there is much more work to be done.

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We have actually engaged with Brazil and opened new trade offices in that country. Brazil is South America's largest economy. Our trade in 2008 totalled some \$2.8 billion, which was an increase of 70% over the year before. That is great news for our economy and it is also great news for Brazil.

At the same time our government launched discussions on an economic partnership with two of the world's largest economic groups, the European Union and India.

It is self-evident that Europe provides a huge opportunity for Canada. We have not had a free trade agreement with European countries in the past but have now started negotiations toward that kind of agreement. If we sign a free trade agreement with the European Union, we expect the benefits to Canada to be in the order of \$12 billion per year.

We are in the middle of a global recession that is impacting all countries around the world. We have an opportunity right now to buttress ourselves against the impacts of that recession and perhaps future economic challenges that will arise around the world. Twelve billion dollars is the potential from one free trade agreement with the European Union alone.

Of interest to my constituents in Abbotsford would be the country of India. Some 20% to 25% of my residents have Indian origin. Some 25,000 Indo-Canadians live in Abbotsford and they frequently travel to and from India. Many of them are business people who have business relationships spanning the globe.

We have recently launched negotiations with India aimed at the conclusion of a comprehensive economic partnership. Simultaneously, we also have discussions underway which are aimed at the conclusion of a nuclear cooperation agreement between our two countries.

We have also opened up eight new trade offices in India. I had the pleasure of accompanying the citizenship and immigration minister to India in January and we were able to see some of the offices that we opened there.

• (1245)

I can say from personal experience, Indians are open to these new trade relationships. They know that there is a mutual benefit there, not only for them but for Canada to strengthen those relationships.

We have not stopped at just India and Europe. We are also looking at the Middle East. Our government has signed a free trade agreement and foreign investment protection agreement with Jordan. We are also having further discussions with the country of Morocco, with a view to perhaps commencing free trade negotiations with that country.

Of course, I have not even mentioned China, which is the world's largest emerging economy. Most Canadians understand how important China is to our economic prosperity and future. Our government has made impressive gains with our commercial relationship. Quite a number of our government's ministers have travelled to India in recent months and in the last two years. China, believe it or not, is now Canada's second largest trading partner. It has leapfrogged over Japan and is now in second place. We would be

remiss if we did not pursue economic and trading opportunities with that country.

To that end, we have recently opened some six new trade offices in various cities in China under our global commerce strategy. Again, this is great news for our country. It is great news for our economic prosperity. In return, of course, we assist China, because that is an emerging economy, one that wants to take its place in the world, wants to modernize, and obviously Canada is willing to cooperate and to become engaged in doing so.

One of the disappointments I recently heard about was that the Liberal Leader of the Opposition had planned to make a trip to China. Because of his focus on trying to win power here in Canada, because of his threats to go to an election, he actually cancelled his trip to China. Here we have opportunities to build these relationships, opportunities to build trading relationships with the largest emerging economy in the world, and the Leader of the Opposition, after making arrangements to travel to China, puts his own political interests ahead of those of Canada by cancelling that visit.

Our Prime Minister is committed to travelling to China in November. He has not cancelled that visit. It surprised me that the Liberal leader would actually do that.

The previous Liberal government, over 13 years, signed a paltry three free trade agreements. In 13 years, only three agreements, which should have strengthened our economy and further cushioned us against things like the current global recession. At this time of global economic downturn, Canadians can count on our Conservative government to oppose protectionism and defend free and open trade on the world's stage. That is why our government has negotiated new free trade agreements with many, many different countries over the last three and a half years, including Colombia. This Colombia free trade agreement will create new jobs for Canadians and Colombians alike, but developing new market opportunities and improving human rights are not mutually exclusive.

Canada has one of the most well-respected human rights records in the world. For us to expect other countries to rise to our level of human rights before we ever engage in trade relationships with them is ridiculous. It is self-evident that if we want to engage with other countries not only on trade but on issues of human rights, it is advisable to link those. That is why the Colombia free trade agreement actually does link those. That free trade agreement has specific provisions addressing labour, human rights and even environmental requirements. There are enforcement provisions in the Colombia free trade agreement as well.

I speak strongly in favour of the government and Parliament moving ahead and finalizing the Colombia free trade agreement. It is good for Canada and it is good for Colombia.

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•(1250)

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I always find it interesting to hear members of the governing party speak about the benefits of free trade and how, given that what we are experiencing today in terms of the economic collapse of the world financial system was driven by unfettered, unregulated free trade and greed, we would still be looking with great joy to even more of that as we try to relate and interact with other jurisdictions in the world. That we would not be refocusing on the reorganization of our own domestic economy at this time speaks to me of being somewhat irresponsible, but that is not what I really wanted to ask him a question about.

He raised the issue of human rights at the end of his speech as if it were just a sidebar. Just one trade unionist should be enough, but the 17 trade unionists killed in 2009 alone should be enough to push any reasonable country away from the table, and ask questions and demand better guarantees as we look at this, if we are going to enter into that kind of a free trade agreement at all.

We had a woman here, the daughter of a free trade unionist who was shot in Colombia, asking us to back away, reassess and do an evaluation before we enter into this trade agreement. Why would we not do that?

•(1255)

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, I know the member takes human rights very seriously and I want to assure him that my reference to human rights in my speech was certainly not a sidebar. I take that very seriously. I anticipated that would be his question because that is the only objection I sense coming from the NDP to signing a free trade agreement with Colombia.

However, I want to remind him that between 2002 and 2008, kidnappings in Colombia decreased by some 87%. Homicide rates have dropped by 44%. Moderate poverty has fallen from 55% to 45% and Colombia has attained coverage of 94% in basic education. The progress that Colombia has already made goes on and on.

As I mentioned in my speech, we are not looking for perfection. We are looking to engage with a country that wants to pull itself out of some of these problems. We want to be partners with them and assist them to do that. That is why some of the collateral agreements to this Colombia free trade agreement address issues such as labour protection, environmental protection and human rights. These are key issues that are indeed addressed in the agreement.

We have general support in the House. We appear to be developing a consensus here. Unfortunately, the NDP does oppose this agreement. However, I also note that the former NDP premier of Ontario, who now sits here as a Liberal, just spoke in favour of this free trade agreement that the NDP members of the House strongly oppose. There appears to be an ideological mix with political partisanship that may be confusing some Canadians.

I would strongly recommend that this member look at the merits and purpose of the agreement, which is to assist Colombia, enhance its human rights record, and at the same time develop a level of prosperity that Colombians themselves are aspiring to.

The Deputy Speaker: There is one minute left in questions and comments, so I can allow a 30 second question and a 30 second response.

The member for Sault Ste. Marie.

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's answer. It is certainly not just human rights that we are raising as an issue in terms of this Colombia free trade agreement, although it is certainly central for us.

I made a mistake. Twenty-seven trade unionists have lost their lives. There have been 60 to 70 extrajudicial murders. If that is somehow a reduction, I can only imagine what it was like and where it will go if we enter into this free trade agreement and that kind of opportunity for—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I will have to stop the member there to allow enough time for a response.

The member for Abbotsford.

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, my friend actually referred to a witness who appeared before committee. I happened to be at that committee meeting and heard the witness speak about some of the concerns they have about personal safety in Colombia.

However, I can also say that by happenstance I had a Colombian citizen visit me in my office in Abbotsford. We were not there to discuss free trade agreements; we were there to discuss something else. I took the opportunity to ask her what the security situation was like in Colombia. She said that her safety has improved considerably. She was a member of a religious minority. She said that country is so much safer today than it used to be.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we are debating the subamendment put forward by the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan to amend the amendment presented by the hon. member for Sherbrooke, which basically calls on this House to refuse to give its consent to Bill C-23, Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act.

With this subamendment, the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan is asking that we consider this refusal, “including having heard vocal opposition to the accord from human rights organizations”. The member is therefore asking this House to refuse to grant its consent based on comments we have received from groups asking us not to support this bill. I must say there are many such groups, both in Canada and in Colombia.

I would like to name a few of those groups: the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, Amnesty International, the FTQ, Development and Peace, KAIROS, the Public Service Alliance of Canada, Lawyers Without Borders, the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, and the National Union of Public and General Employees.

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These are but a few of the organizations in Canada and Quebec calling on us to not support the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement. I must say that, even in Colombia, civil society is trying to mobilize to show its lack of support for this agreement. However, we will agree that it is harder to organize in the rather difficult situation in Colombia.

I would point out that a number of members of our caucus met last February with members of the coalition of social movements and organizations of Colombia, which includes the national indigenous organization of Colombia, the popular women's organization, the national agrarian coordinator, the Christian movement for peace with justice and dignity, the national movement for health and social security, the Afro-American African roots movement and the Black Community Process.

It is extremely important in making a decision to check with a number of the players to see whether there might be a consensus regarding this agreement. Unfortunately, in this matter, I believe a number of voices were raised against the agreement.

In June 2008, here in Parliament, the Standing Committee on International Trade tabled a report entitled *Human Rights, the Environment and Free Trade with Colombia*. The report made a number of recommendations to the government, recommendations the government did not implement. It decided to have the agreement ratified without considering the very sound recommendations made by the committee, including that Canada not sign the free trade agreement with Colombia until it was confirmed that the improvements in human rights were maintained and continuing.

The government nevertheless decided to proceed with the agreement, even though according to the information available to us, Colombia's record continues to be disastrous.

The committee also recommended that governments mandate an independent body to study the impact on rights and the environment of such an agreement. Canada has not done any study. And if studies have been done, the public has not been informed of them.

• (1300)

As well, the committee recommended that a competent body be established to examine the repercussions on human rights comprehensively, impartially and independently.

All of this is part of the process that would have led Canada to sign this trade agreement with a concern for its potential repercussions on the Colombian people. These recommendations came from parliamentarians. Once again, we note the Conservative government's propensity to ignore majority proposals from the House. We have seen and identified a number of proposals right here in this House during the two mandates of the Conservatives. I have to say that this is not the first time the Standing Committee on International Trade has been rebuffed. Last year, the government decided to categorically reject the committee's report calling on it to exclude water from all trade agreements.

Once again, the government decided to ignore the opinion of the House. As members of Parliament, how are we supposed to support such an anti-democratic attitude? Parliament is the voice of the people. When parliamentarians unite to make recommendations to the government, it seems to me that the government should take note

and act accordingly. But ironically, in the case of the free trade agreement with Colombia, the government says that it has to go through with its draft free trade agreement to support democracy in Colombia. How are we supposed to trust the government when it comes to signing a Canada-Colombia free trade agreement when it will not even listen to its own Parliament?

Of course such agreements have to protect investments. We are not opposed to that. However, we must ensure that these agreements respect both partners. The government is calling this a free trade agreement, but free trade agreements are usually negotiated between partners of similar size. In this case, the agreement seems designed to protect investments. In many cases, that makes sense because it creates a predictable environment and ensures that assets belonging to foreign investors will not be taken over in the event of nationalization. In this particular case, we have to ensure that such protection will not be detrimental to the country where the investment is made.

Chapter 11 of NAFTA allows some investors to initiate legal proceedings against countries that seek to change or improve their human rights or environmental laws. It is clear that the contents of this proposal are not in line with what members of the House called for in committee. The government's refusal to heed the recommendations of civil society groups is appalling.

• (1305)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hope I may have a moment to read a letter I just received from Brent Mansfield, from Vancouver. My Bloc colleague may have some comments on this.

In the letter, he says:

[*English*]

I myself was in Colombia for the month of August, including a 10 day delegation investigating the effects of free trade with Colombia. We met with unions (sugarcane cutters in Cali, portworkers in Buenaventura), indigenous groups (Nasa/ ACIN), afro-colombian groups (Calima, Naya), a number of displaced groups (from Narino), and victims of state crimes and so-called 'false positives'. I have many concerns about the possibility of a free trade agreement with Colombia, but also with the model of free trade itself and deeply support the logic of a fair trade model that you proposed. This is what Canada—and the world!—needs, and I am saddened by the way the Liberals and Conservatives are so blindly committed to 'more free and open trade'. Please continue to speak up on this issue and to urge the NDP party to work for a more equitable trade model.

• (1310)

[*Translation*]

That is exactly what we are trying to do. I am certain that my Bloc colleague would like to comment on the fact that it is so important that, after having heard us talk about it, this person decided to write to us immediately.

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Mr. Luc Malo: Mr. Speaker, what my colleague just read is along the lines of what I was saying when I mentioned that the government seems to be ignoring and not hearing the opposing views on this free trade agreement.

I must reiterate and also remind this citizen that the Bloc Québécois has always adhered to the principle that international trade must allow for the mutual enrichment and development of the parties. In the comments read by my colleague, it is evident that what this citizen has observed is not based on the principle of mutual enrichment and development. Therefore, it is important, when establishing trade relations, to always ensure that the government, in this case the Canadian government, is always able to keep applying a certain amount of pressure on the Colombian government with respect to improving the economic activities that take place in its territory. We believe that the wording of this free trade agreement will no longer allow the Government of Canada to apply this needed pressure.

[English]

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the member on this important piece of public business before us here today.

He mentioned improving the situation. Does he have any definition for us of what that might mean? We heard members from the government side talk about the 27 trade unionists who have been killed so far in 2009 and the 60 to 70 extrajudicial murders as an improvement.

Is that, in the member's view, an improvement? Does he have any details he could share with us in terms of what he would accept as improvement?

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Malo: Mr. Speaker, it is difficult to accept that those who defend workers can be killed while carrying out their responsibilities. In my opinion, it is our duty to reject this type of conduct.

Given the numbers provided by my colleague, it is obvious that we cannot accept this type of conduct. We also believe it is important for the government to revise its positions in all trade negotiations to ensure that trade agreements include clauses on the respect for international standards pertaining to labour rights, human rights and the environment.

[English]

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian International Development Agency has been working with the government of Colombia to bring greater peace and security to Colombia.

Although Colombia is an established democracy with a growing economy, a responsible government, an active civil society and stable institutions, it also suffers from the longest running conflict in the Americas. More than three million people are internally displaced in the country. However, in recent years the global community and international organizations working in Colombia have recognized that the personal security conditions of urban Colombians has improved.

With the support of the international community, government authorities and civil society organizations are taking actions that are contributing to increased peace, security and prosperity. It is important that Canada continue to work toward peaceful change in Colombia and we can be very proud of our track record in supporting this process.

In fact, Canada is the lead donor on children's rights and protection in Colombia. CIDA's programs are protecting children from violence, preventing their recruitment into armed conflict and helping them regain their place in their home communities. We promote environmentally sustainable agriculture and provide individuals who have grown illicit crops with alternative livelihoods that contribute to national food security.

Canada's relationship with Colombia includes support for peace and democracy, a strengthened bilateral economic relationship, a frank dialogue on human rights, close co-operation on security and humanitarian issues, counter-narcotics and landmine action.

In the past five years, CIDA has disbursed over \$64 million in Colombia. CIDA programs focus on democratic governance, with an emphasis on the protection and promotion of the human rights of vulnerable people affected by the conflict, especially children, adolescence and internally displaced people.

CIDA has contributed \$8.8 million to assist internally displaced people to claim their rights, strengthen Colombia's national policies and programs that respond to the plight of the displaced and help to find durable solutions that will facilitate their return when possible.

This past February, in fact, the Minister of International Cooperation announced that CIDA would focus 80% of its bilateral programming in 20 countries, and Colombia is one of them. Furthermore, DFAIT's global peace and security program provided more than \$14.5 million in conflict prevention and peace-building programs between 2006 and 2009. The program centres on justice and confidence-building initiatives, support for political dialogue and enhancing security and stability.

Canada is also one of the largest supporters of the Organization of American States' mission to support the peace process in Colombia. This mission has played a critical role in supporting the government's efforts to demobilize paramilitary forces in Colombia. It also protects the rights of women victims of sexual violence, as well as indigenous conflict victims.

Between 2007 and 2009, Canada provided more than \$10 million to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to protect internally displaced people and refugees in neighbouring countries. CIDA works with its trusted multilateral partners, such as the Red Cross and the World Food Programme to reach these people.

In addition, DFAIT's counterterrorism capacity-building program provides states with training, funding, equipment and technical and legal expertise to help prevent terrorist activity. Since 2005, the program has provided \$1.5 million to projects in Colombia.

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Canada is also one of the largest donors for mine action in Colombia. From 2003 to 2008, working primarily through the Organization of American States and UNICEF, Canada contributed more than \$3.7 million for humanitarian demining, stockpile destruction, victim assistance, mine risk education and mine action coordination. Colombia's efforts to achieve greater peace and security are further aligned with Canadian values and interests.

The government of Colombia has taken positive steps that demonstrate its continued efforts to curb violence against trade unionists, to fight impunity for the perpetrators of such crimes, to promote security and peace within a human rights protection framework and to establish the rule of law.

• (1315)

Canada's labour program, through the international program for professional labour administration, is providing \$1 million for labour related technical assistance initiatives in Colombia. These initiatives are helping, not harming, the Colombian labour ministry to increase its capacity to train labour leaders and enforce labour legislation. There are still challenges in Colombia and Canada will continue to do its part to support that country's efforts to strengthen peace, security and full respect for human rights, but strides have been made.

Let me take a moment to tell members some of the results of CIDA's development programs in Colombia. CIDA has been working through the office of the high commissioner for human rights to help the government and civil society organizations to work together to develop a national plan of action on human rights. As a result, human rights are being integrated into the activities of Colombian government institutions and an increased number of officials now know and understand international human rights obligations and are able to implement them. In addition, there has been better media coverage of human rights issues and more information has been made available to the public on human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law.

However, illegal armed groups continue to recruit boys and girls and engage in sexual and gender-based violence as a weapon of war. Children's rights and protection are being given prominence among CIDA's programs to mitigate these challenges, and we are getting results. An estimated 15,000 children and youth have been prevented from being recruited in armed forces and 260 demobilized child combatants have been reintegrated into their home communities.

A new law has been passed on children and youth and more than 12,000 civil servants are trained to implement the law. Approximately 6,000 adolescents have developed their conflict resolution and other life skills in schools, with support from 400 peers trained as youth leaders. Some 70% of all demobilized children and youth will receive better health, education, protection and integration services because of CIDA's efforts.

Since Colombia has the second largest population of internally displaced persons in the world, three to four million people, and is the country in the Americas that is the most affected by landmines and explosive remnants of war, CIDA's support is helping improve the lives of a significant number of Colombians.

Colombia now has public policies and programs that protect and guarantee the rights of internally displaced persons, programs that take into account the different needs of women, children and ethnic minorities. CIDA's efforts have also led to protection being provided to 470,000 internally displaced people who did not receive benefits because they were not part of the national registry. More than 100,000 of these displaced people were issued identity documents through the national registry office and are now able to receive the services to which they are entitled.

We believe that Canada's efforts to advance a free trade agreement and to promote and protect human and labour rights in Colombia are mutually re-enforcing and equally important. The economic development that flows from increased trade, in tandem with enforcement of labour rights, will strengthen Colombia's social foundations, reduce violence and bring greater security and prosperity to Colombians.

Colombia is an important strategic trade and investment partner for Canada and Canadian companies are very involved in Colombian mining, oil and gas projects. As I am sure all members are aware, CIDA's mandate is to reduce poverty and foster sustainable development. Economic growth is one of the three themes that the minister has spelled out for all CIDA programs, along with children and youth and food security. In Colombia economic growth through the free trade agreement will not only help to secure the futures of children in adolescence, it is the key to stability, security and environmentally sustainable growth.

I ask my fellow members to consider that the economic growth this agreement will bring can help to solidify the government of Colombia's efforts to create a more prosperous, equitable and sure democracy. I, as a mother of five children, hope that all members think about their own children when they vote. This is an important issue for not only Canadians but for Colombians and their children. Please vote for this. Please support this and make a difference not only in humanitarian issues but in economic issues. I applaud all members who have stood before us today to indicate their support.

• (1320)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member.

Given our economy and the opportunities provided to us by Colombia, could she tell us, in millions of dollars, the level of our trade with that country? If we are going to engage in free trade, it has to be a profitable venture. Is it indeed profitable, or is our interest more of a political than an economic nature?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

Government Orders

I am quite prepared to answer the question relating to money, but I want to be very clear. In my opinion, and in our government's opinion, the two issues are really on a par. Indeed, the economy and the protection of human rights in Colombia are similar issues.

I am going to talk about Quebec, since the hon. member comes from that province.

• (1325)

[English]

In 2008 Quebec's total exports to Colombia were valued at \$120 million, which represented 17% of Canada's total exports to the country. Quebec's leading exports to Colombia include paper and paperboard, valued at approximately \$21.1 million, copper articles, mainly wire, valued at \$25.9 million in exports and machinery valued at approximately \$32.1 million.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member and the government pretend to be tough on crime. However, the member should know that 2,690 trade unionists have been murdered in Colombia since 1986. In 2008 the number of murders was up by 18% over the previous year. So far this year, 27 trade unionists have been murdered up to September. In fact, the Obama administration in the United States has put a halt on negotiating a free trade deal with Colombia. The British, our other allies, have cut military aid to the country.

Why would the member want to support rewarding a country that has a terrible human rights record? Why do we not sit back, take a look and investigate this issue further before we go ahead holus-bolus and try to sign an agreement with Colombia at this time?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, some of the facts just represented by the member are inaccurate and need some clarification. The United States just recently provided the funding that was being held back. I suggest the member may want to review his facts.

Aside from the United States coming to conclusion that it should provide this funding, I want to clearly state that I stand behind being tough on crime. I believe it is absolutely absurd for the NDP to suggest in any way, shape or form, that our measures and the measures of many other countries in the world, by initiating free trade agreements that help humanitarian issues and help economic growth, would lend to the death of any of those trade unionists. The death of anyone is absolutely horrific. I clearly I do not support anyone in the House who suggests that free trade agreements by many countries in the world lend to the death of union representatives. Our hearts go out to those families equally.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what effect would signing the agreement have on the CIDA aid she outlined?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I believe it will enhance our position. I am very proud of our government and the work that is being done with CIDA.

As I outlined in my speech and my comments, CIDA has taken initiative in many countries, and Colombia is one country that we are wholly looking at defending and supporting. This agreement would initiate further confidence measures. I believe Canada has been looked upon as a leader in this regard.

I believe that many of the members of the Liberal Party are in support of our measures, thanks to the co-operation and the results we have achieved through CIDA.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is a democratic country that respects the rule of law, a country that respects human rights. We must ensure that we support countries that seek these objectives and that work to reach them. That is one of the reasons why Canada must try to sign bilateral trade agreements and to improve economic opportunities for Colombia's businesses. We must reconcile this goal with the responsibility to promote human rights.

We feel that a free trade agreement would encourage the Colombian government to undertake other reforms to promote economic growth, public safety and human rights. Over the past few years, Colombia has made real progress regarding the economy, and also social and public safety programs, but it is a fragile process. FARC terrorists, drug traffickers and attacks from the Chavez regime in Venezuela are all constant threats. Colombia is a beautiful country where honest people live and where natural resources abound. It is a country where the situation has been catastrophic for over 40 years, a country that has been paralyzed and divided by a civil war that began as ideological differences, but turned into a war without any ideological basis between drug traffickers, a war that has generated nothing but greed, despair and violence.

Since 2002, huge progress has been made, particularly with regard to public safety. Eight years ago, people were afraid to walk in the streets of Bogota and 400 towns were still controlled by FARC. This progress must continue, and so far it has been supported.

Some members of civil society have said they are opposed to Bill C-23 for reasons of human rights. There has been corruption and human rights violations in Colombia for years. Human Rights Watch, however, has noted that "under US pressure related to the FTA, Colombia has started to take some positive steps on impunity for anti-union violence", although these improvements are incomplete.

Progress has been made since 2002, although violence continues. Corruption is also chronic in Colombia: more than 30 members of its Congress were under arrest in 2008 and more than 60 were being investigated on suspicion of ties to the paramilitaries. Despite these investigations, it is important to note that the paramilitaries are financed by Colombian drug trafficking and that they themselves help to perpetuate it. Civil society members agree that Colombia cannot fight effectively against drug trafficking and corruption or make lasting improvements in public safety unless its legitimate economy improves, jobs are created and there are opportunities for marginalized people.

Government Orders

Bill C-23 is opposed by labour unions such as the United Steelworkers and the Canadian Labour Congress, but they have opposed all of Canada's free trade agreements. The Canadian unions say that the Colombian government has implicitly encouraged anti-union violence and that the conclusion of a free trade agreement with Colombia signifies that we accept this. Human rights and labour rights groups do not want to see the Government of Colombia "rewarded" with a free trade agreement. Much remains to be accomplished in Colombia. This country needs our help.

If we close the door on a country like Colombia that is making progress, especially at a time when leaders of civil society, labour unions, governments and victims of violence by paramilitary groups and FARC guerrillas are trying to make progress, if we isolate Colombia in the Andes region and leave it exposed and vulnerable to unilateral, ideological attacks from Chavez's Venezuela, we will just be allowing evil to prosper.

There is no moral justification for Canadians to do nothing. If a single member of Parliament or a single Canadian is concerned about the human rights situation in Colombia, then we must demand more of this country.

The free trade agreement creates a strong, regulated system to monitor the rights of working people, human rights and the environmental progress made in Colombia and to help Colombians manage and improve these rights and this progress.

● (1330)

Workers' rights and the problems in this area occurred without any free trade agreement. Trade links between Canada and Colombia exist already, but no regulated system exists to direct this relationship.

The provisions of this new free trade agreement are the strongest yet with respect to workers and the environment. In fact, none of the agreements signed by Canada to date contain such provisions. Accordingly, as Canadians, we must ask ourselves how such an agreement could do anything but strengthen our ability to influence human rights and workers' rights in Colombia positively.

Overall, most people and groups, including human rights NGOs, support ratification of the free trade agreement with Canada. They do not think this agreement would have a negative impact on the economy or human rights in Colombia. Many even believe that the agreement could increase Canada's oversight of workers' and indigenous rights thanks to its framework, which provides rules, and to the two side agreements in the areas of labour and the environment.

Canada has noted the difficulties faced by the Uribe government in its fight against the production and trafficking of narcotics and against FARC and emerging criminal gangs. Canada has noted as well the progress made in disarming paramilitary groups and reducing violence in general and violence against unionists in particular. The Colombian senators also spoke of a tripartite commission comprising the government, the unions and employers. This commission, under the supervision of the International Labour Organization, is helping Colombia honour its commitments to the ILO. At its annual meeting in 2009, the ILO reported progress in Colombia.

Finally, and this is the most important part, most of the senators that Canada met acknowledged that a free trade agreement with Canada would strengthen and improve living conditions in Colombia. Such an agreement would help to reduce poverty, prevent the resurgence of illegal armed groups and keep more Colombians from becoming dependent on the narco-economy.

The Canadian delegation met a group of Colombian economists who indicated their support for a rules-based free trade agreement with Canada. They pointed out how vital it was for Colombia to conclude this free trade agreement, especially since countries such as Chile and Peru had managed to conclude such agreements with key trading partners, including Canada. They stressed the need for Colombia to diversify its trade relations away from countries such as Hugo Chavez's Venezuela. The threat that Chavez represents for Colombia was a recurrent theme throughout Canada's meetings in Colombia. They said as well that there are increasing numbers of FARC guerrillas in Venezuela, who are protected by the Chavez government so they can continue to launch attacks against Colombia and against companies and individuals there.

A number of unions in the private sector in Colombia support the union movement. There, the union movement represents 6% of the labour force, and opposition to this agreement comes primarily from the public sector within the union movement. The trade unionists in the public sector have nothing to lose by supporting a rigid anti-free trade ideology. Those with the most to gain from the free trade agreement, however, are the workers in the parallel economy, who represent 56% of the labour force.

In conclusion, since I have less than a minute left, I would like to say that now is the time for Canadians who are so concerned about the welfare of Colombians to give them a chance to be a part of the economy and not let them be the victims of an ideology. The road to hell is paved with good intentions. Legitimate trading activities can help the people of Colombia replace the forces of evil with the forces of hope. Now is the time for Canadians to reach out to Colombians and help them build a more peaceful, prosperous and just future.

● (1335)

[English]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this discussion certainly takes it to hear.

The member for Saint Boniface made some comments a few minutes ago. I would like to share this, and maybe the Liberal member could comment.

Government Orders

There are serious issues about what she had indicated, touting the amazing work of CIDA in Colombia. While there is some truth to what she is saying, we were concerned to learn that CIDA played a significant role in helping Colombia rewrite its mining code so as to make it more friendly for transnational investment and, consequently, much more difficult for local artisanal miners. This is all documented in a great book called, *The Profits of Extermination*: by Francisco Ramirez Cuellar.

How does this represent the poverty reduction and sustainable development that the member for Saint Boniface, with the help of the Liberals, espouses CIDA is so much about?

• (1340)

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, I find it unfortunate that some members of the New Democratic Party manage to see only the negative side of an issue like this one. Colombians could integrate themselves into the official economy if exports from Colombia and direct foreign investments continued to grow in that country. Economists agree—I am not talking about members of the NDP—that security in Colombia has improved considerably under the Uribe regime and that the demobilization of paramilitaries is on the right track.

During their trip to Colombia, the delegation met with civil society groups that are concerned about human rights. They talked about their concerns regarding former paramilitary groups in Colombia that have become criminal organizations involved in the drug trade. They met with a representative of the National Organization of Indigenous People of Colombia, who said that more consultation with indigenous communities is needed regarding issues such as investing and free trade, as well as protecting biodiversity.

If we only look for the negative aspects, we will definitely find them. However, if the New Democratic Party would like to show a bit of compassion, if it would like to help Colombian society, I think the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages.

[English]

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the hon. member's discussion on this important topic. At one point he mentioned, in a general sense, some of the improvements that have in fact been occurring in Colombia in recent years with respect to crime and security in particular. I wonder if the member could perhaps expand on some of those themes for the House?

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, that is a very interesting question and I would like to talk some more about the advantages, not the disadvantages. Much like his colleague earlier, the hon. member's question gives me the opportunity to continue along the same lines.

The Canadian delegation met with all kinds of people—some with decision-making authority, some opinion leaders and some from the business world. Human rights groups told the delegation that the free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia must be firm when it comes to labour rights. During the trip, the delegation met with

union leaders and representatives of industry. They told the delegation that narcotics trafficking can largely be attributed to the fact that, in Colombia's poor regions, especially in rural areas, there are no alternatives, and that legitimate trade opportunities must be created.

When there are few opportunities or alternatives in rural areas, of course crime is going to increase and narcotics trafficking will continue. As we all know, where there is a drug trade, people's safety will be jeopardized on a daily basis.

So, once again, we must look at the positive side in order to help Colombian society.

[English]

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is great to be back and opening up our fall session with a discussion, as I said earlier, on a topic that is very important not only to Canada but also to Colombia.

There is no doubt members realize that especially during these economic times brought on by a global economic recession, it is vital for Canada to continue to keep its doors open for business opportunities where investment can grow. I have seen examples of this need right in my own riding of Simcoe North where producers and manufacturers, those involved in supplying key industries that would be able to expand and grow in a market like Colombia, would directly benefit.

It is a great delight to be part of a discussion that is advancing opportunities for investment and for business growth for Canadians.

The Colombia free trade agreement is part of this government's ongoing focus on expanding our interests in trade generally. As was commented on earlier in this debate, Canada has been active on a number of fronts, not just in the Americas but in Europe and Asia as well. All of this is vital in terms of expanding the reach and in turn the prosperity that companies can provide, operating here in Canada and supplying to markets and supply chains active in these new markets for our country.

Looking at our overall progress in the last few years, we need look back no more than four years to see that we have opened up new agreements with not only Colombia but also Peru, Jordan and Panama. Of course we are all familiar with the works that have been concluded in EFTA.

In addition to working on specific bilateral trade agreements, we are continuing to keep more trade offices open in emerging markets and those that we know are vital to our own interests.

We are helping to expand trade. We are opening doors for Canadian business and encouraging investment at a very critical time for our country. Through the Prime Minister's interest in expanding our interest in the Americas, this has been ongoing for close to three years.

I have mentioned some of the markets that we are already expanding into, but the Americas are of particular interest to Canada because of our geographic proximity, being in the same hemisphere.

Government Orders

This is an area where Canada can play an increasingly vital role not just in trade, but also in areas of defence and policies relating to our diplomatic efforts in our part of the world. When events unfold in this hemisphere, Canada's interests are more directly impacted and so our focus on trade and on greater and stronger ties with other nations in the Americas are of tremendous benefit not just to Canada but to all of the member countries that make up this hemisphere.

It should not be lost on members or those who are listening at home that we are not only achieving an economic benefit by these agreements but that we are also helping to reinforce our own national and security interests at the same time.

Let me take a moment to speak a bit more specifically about Colombia in particular.

Members have heard a number of points made on both sides of the questions, both pro and con. It cannot be lost on our audience in the House or on people who are tuning in that these kinds of agreements represent benefits not just for Canadians but also for Colombians.

• (1345)

On the whole issue of advancing human rights and making sure that we are recognizing important labour and environmental standards in the course of these agreements, it should be understood that the interests of advancing human rights and those of advancing economic benefits are not mutually exclusive. That is to say that one can benefit the other. They are indeed complementary activities that we need to be engaged in on both fronts, not just to create an economic upside.

We all recognize that Colombia is still moving along the path of better security at home and better recognition of human rights. Certainly, Canada has been active in advancing those interests. We are not there yet, but something like increased trade with a country like Colombia can move that along at a much quicker pace.

We need to realize that Colombia is not going to make much more progress on human rights if they become isolated by the international community. That is something that is certainly not lost on our interests here in Canada. Indeed, we have seen where Colombia is taking up the same kinds of discussions with the United States, the European Free Trade Association and, in the near term, with the European Union as well.

While we recognize that it is still not perfect there, we need to see that progress is being made and that the continued engagement of Canada and other international partners in Colombia is going to advance and improve the situation on the ground. We have made some terrific progress in the last four to five years.

What are the direct elements of a free trade agreement? I suspect these are items that may have been covered in earlier discussions, but I am delighted to see that this is the kind of free trade agreement that is going to include greater market access for goods, better cross-border trade and services and investment in the financial services sector and in government procurement. In this day and age, we know that in order for businesses in Canada or those in Colombia to be successful, they have to be part of an integrated industrial supply chain that is producing goods and services not just for their own markets but for the world.

The more we open up the doors to investment in other countries, the greater the chance that Canadian companies right here at home are going to be able to participate and supply goods and services to those transactions. It is not like it was a decade or more ago, when we looked for markets in isolated pockets. This is a large and growing global supply chain that our companies can play a greater part in and indeed they are doing so. As we open up more agreements just like this one, the upside for our companies becomes even greater.

I will go back to a point I made earlier with respect to benefits for Colombians themselves. Right off the bat, a free trade agreement like this is going to reduce if not eliminate tariffs for Colombian manufacturers, exporters and producers. They will then be able to increase trade with Canada and probably even expand into North American markets in the near term. More liberalized trade will expand investment and create more job opportunities for Colombians on the ground. However, the same can be said for those businesses that are part of that activity right here in Canada.

I am getting the sign that we are just about out of time here. I would just like to sum up and say that this is exactly the kind of activity that we need to continue to make a part of our priorities on the economic front. It is going to bring great results for us here at home. At the same time, it is going to be advancing security and interests important to that host country as well.

Let us continue to keep on with these kinds of free trade agreements. They are going to make the world a much better place. We know that to be true from our own examples these last few years.

• (1350)

I invite questions from the hon. members.

• (1355)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two quick questions.

First, could the member elaborate on the effect that Colombian investment has had in Canada, and vice versa, the effect that Canadian investment has had in Colombia?

Second, as chair of the aboriginal affairs committee, does the member have any comments on the relations between the Colombian government and aboriginal peoples? That matter has been raised earlier in this debate.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Mr. Speaker, we know that at the moment, there is about \$1.1 billion worth of trade between Canada and Colombia now. We know that a good portion of that is in some of the resource industries, in oil and gas and in the mining sector.

We also realize that because those are key industries for us here in Canada, there are a number of businesses that in fact supply that sector. I can think of one in my own neighbourhood that is producing tube and machinery parts and heavy equipment that become part of that trade mechanism. The absence of tariffs allows those industries to be more competitive, expand and grow, and create more jobs.

On the second point, and I appreciate the hon. member pointing this out, there is indeed an indigenous population in Colombia that needs to be just as well engaged as the union sector and other interests in making sure that those—

Statements by Members

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Western Arctic.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am interested in my colleague's comments about the impact of this free trade deal on the Colombian people.

It has been shown in this House, through statistics garnered from Statistics Canada and processed by the parliamentary library, that the free trade arrangements we have made with the United States and other countries over the years have actually resulted in a greater disparity between upper-income and lower-income people in Canada.

In Colombia there is tremendous inequality at this time. With a free trade arrangement that is going to open up the potential for agribusinesses to move vast quantities of low-priced agricultural products into an indigenous population, where 22% use subsistence agriculture—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Simcoe North. Order, please.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question, but in all honesty, I could not disagree more.

The results of our work in expanding free trade have been nothing but positive. We realize and accept that these things do take time, but when trade and commerce can flourish in a market like that, incomes can improve, and as they do, a higher standard of living can be realized for citizens in both countries.

That is the target, and indeed what comes along with that is better security and a better ability to recognize and bring to some kind of balance the societal issues that are equally part of the kinds of difficulties that Colombia has. It is, however, not going to solve those without some ability on the economic side.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank the member for Simcoe North for his assistance on this bill and his interventions.

Second, I would like him to comment on the fact that the NDP has been very critical of this bill, but the reality is that it has never supported a free trade agreement that has gone through this House, not one time, ever.

This particular agreement has a labour cooperation agreement that will bring the elimination of child labour, allow for freedom of association and allow for the right to bargain collectively. I cannot understand why the NDP would not support this particular bill.

Mr. Bruce Stanton: Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for making some very critical points that do in fact support the labour agreements that are integral to this.

I am just as confused as to why the New Democratic Party does not support these, because in fact they have a tremendous upside for Canadian workers. A party that purports to represent Canadian families should realize the kinds of benefits that come from an agreement like this.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

SUICIDE

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, suicide has caused the tragic death of far too many Canadians. While suicide is too often kept quiet, we continue, nonetheless, to hear about individuals who have taken their own lives.

Everyone in this chamber has struggled with, or is familiar with those who struggle with, depression or mental health issues. Unfortunately, there are predators hiding behind the anonymity of the Internet, adopting false identities to convince vulnerable individuals to throw away the gift of life.

My private member's motion, Motion No. 388, calls on the government to update Canada's laws to ensure that counselling a person to commit suicide, or aiding or abetting a person in a suicide attempt, is a crime, regardless of the means used.

Over 8,000 Canadians have signed petitions in support of this initiative, and that number continues to grow.

I encourage all members to consult their constituents regarding Internet predators and to take action to protect Canadians when they are most vulnerable.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are 10 million sockeye salmon missing from the Fraser River this year. Returns were much smaller than the Department of Fisheries and Oceans had predicted.

There were a record number of smolts in 2007, which should have resulted in a huge return this year. However, only a very small portion of the smolts have returned this year to the Fraser River system. This is a crisis.

There was evidence in 2007 that something had happened to those smolts before they reached the ocean. Surveys of sockeye salmon heading to the ocean done in the Strait of Georgia in the summer of 2007 came up with very small numbers.

Why did DFO not raise the alarm at that time? What research has been done to determine the fate of all those salmon in 2007? Why did DFO continue to predict massive returns this year when it was clear that many smolts had perished before even making it to the ocean?

The loss of these fish is having a huge impact on aboriginal communities, the commercial fishery, and most importantly, the ecosystem.

Why is the minister not saying anything on this? Why is she mute on this issue?

Statements by Members

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF DEMOCRACY

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as vice-president of the Interparliamentary Union, I am honoured to speak about the second International Day of Democracy, observed today, September 15.

The United Nations chose this date because it was on this same date in 1997 that the Interparliamentary Union adopted the Universal Declaration on Democracy. This declaration affirms the international nature of democracy and its foundations.

As elected officials, we must remember that our predecessors fought for the rights we now take for granted. The quality of democratic life that we enjoy today did not come about by accident. It is the result of countless battles fought. We must remember that, and not ever think that democratic freedom is everlasting or irreversible.

That said, on this International Day of Democracy, we can be proud of the progress we have made.

* * *

[English]

GRANDMOTHERS FOR AFRICA

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend I greeted Grandmothers for Africa as they pedalled into Victoria ending a 280-kilometre fundraising ride.

These remarkable women are recipients of the Rosemary Brown Award for Women for their tireless work in solidarity with grandmothers in Africa.

So today I rise to support the grandmothers' campaign to unblock Canada's access to medicines regime and get affordable generic drugs moving to the world's most vulnerable people.

This week, the second half of the first and only shipment under this legislation is leaving Canada for Rwanda, and the generic provider has said that it will be the last shipment unless the regime is amended.

My colleague, the member for Winnipeg North, has introduced Bill C-393 to remedy the regime's flaws. I urge all members to think like a grandmother and support this bill.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, throughout my great riding of Leeds—Grenville there are shovels in the ground, there are roads, sewers, and other infrastructure works being built and repaired, and folks are looking forward to the future.

Everywhere I travelled in my riding this summer the people told me they are pleased with the direction our government has taken to help position Canada to face tomorrow.

This summer I attended openings of the new ethanol plant in Johnstown and a wind farm on Wolfe Island, major investments in green industries that our government is supporting.

I saw dollars flowing directly to community futures development corporations to help kick-start local economic development, economic development that is supported by our government.

My constituents have one message: Remain focused on the economy and do not have an expensive and unnecessary election.

* * *

● (1405)

SOUTH AFRICA

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recently returned from a historic and moving trip to South Africa, where I met with the heroes of the anti-apartheid movement, including Winnie Mandela and now-President Jacob Zuma, as well as those with whom I was associated in the defence of Nelson Mandela—George Bizos and Albie Sachs—while returning to lecture at Wits University, where I was arrested in 1981 for advocating Nelson Mandela's release.

There is an important Canada-South Africa connection in matters of constitutionalism and human rights. Just as the South African Bill of Rights draws upon our charter, we can learn from and draw upon South African constitutionalism, particularly in the matter of equality rights, free speech jurisprudence and the rights of children.

Similarly, I spoke with President Zuma about using South Africa's moral authority to exercise moral leadership internationally in support of the Canadian-sponsored resolution on Iranian human rights violations and the Burmese democracy movement, while appreciating his condemnation of all forms of racism and anti-Semitism.

The anti-apartheid movement was an important part of my advocacy and of my identity for 20 years. This trip reunited me with my heroes, while reminding me of our imperatives domestically and internationally.

* * *

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning Premier Dalton McGuinty told reporters that he has received the Liberal leader's backing for the harmonized sales tax.

According to the premier:

We have secured [the Leader of the Opposition]'s commitments to moving ahead with the single sales tax should he earn the privilege of serving Canadians in government.

The Leader of the Opposition's secret guarantee contradicts his public attack on harmonization. Just the other week, the Liberal leader told CTV News:

The HST...the thing that concerns us is that [this] government has, during a time of recession and economic difficulty, basically pushed sales tax harmonization across the country...

Statements by Members

This is not a flip-flop. His action is calculated and opportunistic. The Liberal leader is deliberately saying one thing to Ontarians while cutting the opposite deal behind closed doors. It is more evidence that he is not in it for Canadians, he is in it for himself.

* * *

[Translation]

TORNADO IN MONT-LAURIER

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on August 4, an F2 tornado touched down in Mont-Laurier.

More than 50 houses sustained damage when the tornado hit, and over twenty of them are now uninhabitable. The tornado tore the roofs off of houses and businesses and uprooted several trees.

I would like to thank the emergency measures committee, the Mont-Laurier fire department, Mayor Michel Adrien and the citizens for their excellent work. Rarely have I witnessed such strong solidarity. Despite the dismal and discouraging circumstances, people supported one another.

Unfortunately, two people who came to witness the extent of the damage caused by the tornado died as a result of a helicopter accident. I would like to offer my sincere condolences to the family of pilot Roger Bélanger and CTV cameraman Hugh Haugland.

I want the people of Mont-Laurier to know that they have my full support during this difficult time.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has been clear and consistent in our efforts to fight white-collar crime. We sympathize with families who have lost money at the hands of these criminals.

Yesterday a member of the integrated market enforcement teams of the RCMP announced that charges have been laid in the case of an international ponzi-type investment fraud scheme of over \$100 million. I would like to commend the RCMP, the Public Prosecution Service of Canada, and local police for their dedicated work on this investigation.

Arrests like this are only part of our government's commitment to stopping white-collar crime and standing up for victims of these elaborate fraud schemes. In addition to increased funding for integrated market enforcement teams, the Minister of Justice has laid out legislative changes that we plan to introduce soon to combat white-collar crime. I call upon the opposition to work with us to pass our crime bills and not to gut these bills as they have done previously.

In order for this important bill to go forward, the Leader of the Opposition must stop trying to force wasteful, opportunistic elections or a reckless, soft-on-crime coalition government.

• (1410)

[Translation]

THE PRIME MINISTER

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in public, the Prime Minister says that he does not want an election. However, behind closed doors, he dreams of a Conservative majority.

We have all seen the video in which he says he hopes there will be an election very soon in order to teach Canadians a lesson.

We are entitled to ask if the Prime Minister is in a position to teach anyone a lesson given that the deficit grows every time his Minister of Finance opens his mouth, 1.5 million Canadians are unemployed and bankruptcies have reached record levels.

Furthermore, the Prime Minister believes that women form, and I quote, a “fringe group”. He calls our judges “left-wing ideologues”. He said he was eager to get rid of the gun registry, which is supported by police forces across the country.

How long will we be forced to forget the values that have made Canada the envy of the world?

How many times will we have to swallow the Conservatives' broken promises?

This Prime Minister does not deserve the trust of Canadians.

* * *

[English]

THE LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY

Mr. Andrew Saxton (North Vancouver, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to read a statement made by an hon. member of the House yesterday morning:

Yeah, another one, a fourth election in six years. Canadians don't want elections and I agree with them. It is terrible that we have to be in constant election cycles right here.

That quotation is from the same hon. member who criticized the Liberal leader's lack of clarity and lack of wisdom. It was made by none other than the Liberal MP for Papineau.

Canadians do not want an election. The hon. member for Papineau does not want an election. In fact, the only person in Canada who wants an election is the Leader of the Opposition. What a lack of wisdom.

* * *

MURIEL DUCKWORTH

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as a past recipient of the Muriel Duckworth Award, it is my incredible privilege to rise today to honour the life of Muriel Duckworth.

Muriel Duckworth was known as a wonderful, warm, caring human being. She was also a woman who was tough as nails: a committed activist who called out inequality and intolerance.

Statements by Members

In the tradition of the suffragettes, Ms. Duckworth took care of her family while working tirelessly towards peace and justice. She challenged racially discriminating hiring practices. She was a founding member of many grassroots organizations, including the Voice of Women for Peace. She joined in the struggle for justice in many areas, including health care, education, day care and economic development. But she is perhaps best known for her tireless work integrating pacifism and feminism. She was a pioneer.

We were so lucky to be able to share Ms. Duckworth's 100th birthday with her this year in Halifax.

We thank Muriel. We will do our best to carry on her legacy.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government is focused on what matters to Canadians: our economic recovery and helping out those hit hardest by this global economic recession. To such ends, yesterday the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development announced that our government will introduce new measures to further support long-tenured workers.

By providing additional weeks of EI to unemployed Canadians who have worked hard and paid EI premiums for years, we are helping them transition back to work. This is the fair and right thing to do. It will make a significant difference in the lives of Canadians and their families, particularly in the great Kenora riding.

In contrast, the Liberal Party leader is only focused on his own interests in trying to force an unnecessary election that will harm our economic recovery.

After abandoning the interests of unemployed Canadians this summer, the Liberal leader confirmed yesterday that he will be voting against long-tenured workers, their families, and our initiatives to help unemployed Canadians. This just shows that the Liberal leader does not care about unemployed Canadians and their families, only about himself.

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[Translation]

MEMBER FOR BAS-RICHELIEU—NICOLET—BÉCANCOUR

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 25th anniversary of the election of the member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, who is the most senior member of this House.

He was elected in 1984, during the time of the “beau risque”, as it was called by René Lévesque. He has since been re-elected seven times.

The hopes of the “beau risque” have long since faded away.

That ship sailed with the collapse of the Meech Lake Accord.

Our colleague recognized this and helped found the Bloc Québécois, a sovereignist party.

Despite appearances, he did not change parties, because he represents loyalty to the Quebec nation, a loyalty that only the Bloc enables him to fully express.

Our friend was elected eight times because he is always there for his constituents.

And 8,000 of them came to pay tribute to him in Sorel-Tracy on September 4.

We are proud to work alongside him, and to have him as chair of our party's caucus.

We pay tribute to him today for his loyalty to Quebec and his loyalty to his constituents and colleagues.

* * *

● (1415)

[English]

LEADER OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are watching with interest the blooming romance between the Prime Minister and the leader of the NDP. Like many relationships, things started out a bit rocky.

For a long time, the Prime Minister was quite derisive of the NDP leader, calling him a “left-wing ideologue”, and his party “the Bloc anglais”. It might have had something to do with the fact that the NDP tried to kill the government 79 times, but it is all behind them now and the romance is in full bloom.

In retrospect, we all should have suspected something was afoot when the NDP changed its website to blue, featured its leader wearing a sweater vest, and talked about changing the name of the party. But I must say, I have a sad feeling this romance will only end up in heartache for all Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to read a statement made yesterday morning by a member of the House: “A fourth election in six years...is not something Canadians want, and I agree with them. These constant elections are awful”.

Those words were spoken by none other than the same member who criticized the Liberal leader for his lack of clarity and wisdom, the Liberal member for Papineau. Canadians do not want an election. The member for Papineau does not want an election. It turns out that the only person in Canada who wants an election is the Leader of the Opposition.

How foolish! How egocentric!

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS**

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, seven months ago, the Prime Minister met with President Obama. Seven months ago buy American was threatening Canadian jobs, country of origin labelling was hurting our pork and beef exporters and a thickening border was damaging trade and tourism. Seven months later, these things have only gotten worse.

For seven months, the Prime Minister has ceased to have any credibility in advancing the Canadian cause in the United States. How will the 42 minutes tomorrow be any different?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I anticipate, not just with President Obama but with congressional leaders, discussing things like environment and energy security, discussing peace and international security and, of course, discussing the economy, which all governments of the G20 are focused on primarily now and which I would encourage the Leader of the Opposition to focus on instead of trying to force a needless and wasteful election.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister just said that he wants to talk about clean energy, which is an important subject, but he does not have any credibility on the subject. He has had three environment ministers in as many years. We have the worst climate change record in the G8. We have no plan to create the green jobs of tomorrow.

How can we trust the Prime Minister to advance the cause of the environment in 42 minutes tomorrow when he has failed for four years?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this summer, for example, I announced the Mayo B hydro project in the Yukon, which is an important project, not just for the economy but for the environment as well.

We have a clean energy dialogue going on with the United States administration. Both of our governments are putting a lot of money into both green and clean energy technology.

In fact, I do recall a time not too many weeks ago where the Leader of the Opposition actually supported those initiatives. I would encourage him to go back to supporting positive initiatives instead of trying to force the country into a wasteful election for his own purposes.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this dialogue on climate and the environment is a dialogue of the deaf. Seven months ago, the Prime Minister met with President Obama. Buy American was threatening our jobs at the time. That threat is still there.

How can we trust that the Prime Minister can advance Canada's cause in 42 minutes tomorrow when he has yet to accomplish anything in four years?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, Canada-U.S. relations have greatly

improved since we came to power in 2006. Tomorrow, I will have important discussions with the Americans, with the President and congressional leaders, about issues such as the environment, energy, peace and international security, and especially the economy.

Our government and President Obama's government are focused on the economy, and I encourage the Leader of the Opposition to do the same, instead of triggering a needless and opportunistic election.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only climate change we have witnessed today is the change in the colour of the Prime Minister's tie. It has changed from blue to orange.

Although the NDP leader and the Conservative Prime Minister are trying to invent a new dance, known as the SOCO or socialist-conservative dance, Quebeckers are no fools. They have no faith in this government. Tomorrow, the Prime Minister will be in Washington. Will this be another Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde?

We would like to know who will be the real Prime Minister? Will it be the friend of the reformist dinosaurs, who we heard speaking in Sault Ste. Marie, or the smiling Conservative charlatan?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, could my colleague ask a question rather than blathering?

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I find interesting about this minister's tie is that now that it is almost blue, it is turning orange.

At the meeting of the three *amigos* this summer, President Obama pushed aside, even trivialized, the issue of the "Buy American" clause. He even said that it was not that serious and not to worry. At the time, the Prime Minister had the opportunity to protect the interests of Quebeckers and Canadians, yet he did nothing. Tomorrow marks one month of silence. It has been seven months since he said anything. He will have another opportunity to assert our interests.

How can we have confidence in this Prime Minister when he is rendered speechless by President Obama?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, protectionism poses a serious problem for us in our dealings with the representatives in the U.S. Congress. That is why we presented a counter proposal. A few days ago I met with representatives in Washington to present our solution. Our trade negotiators are working on a document and we are continuing to work on a solution.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the government announced new employment insurance measures, but many questions remain unanswered. For example, will this measure help workers in the forestry industry, which has been going through a very hard time for years, particularly in Quebec? Will this measure help workers in the pulp and paper industry, where several mills have been going through intermittent closures?

In other words, the Conservative government may have good intentions, but will its conditions not deny lots of what it calls long-tenured workers access to additional weeks of benefits?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is perfectly clear that the measures the minister announced yesterday are good measures for Canadian workers in all sectors, for long-tenured workers who need their benefit period extended during the recession.

I encourage the Bloc Québécois to support these measures for Canadian workers and the unemployed.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let us consider older workers, those 55 and over. These are people who have been working for the same company for 25 or 30 years—that is what I call long-tenured. But every year, they go through a period of unemployment. According to the criteria, they will not be entitled to the new benefits, but Ontario auto workers will.

Will the conditions that apply to Ontario auto workers also apply to Quebec forestry workers? That is my question and I would like an answer.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these improvements to employment insurance will be good for all unemployed workers in all industries in Canada. This is not a policy for a single industry or province. It is for everyone.

It is time for the Bloc to support positive measures for workers and the unemployed in Quebec.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what we just heard is inaccurate, given that, despite yesterday's announcement, the ongoing problem is access to the employment insurance system. According to the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development website, approximately 50% of unemployed workers do not have access to the EI system.

How can the minister claim to be helping workers, when half of all unemployed workers are being left to fend for themselves at a time when jobs are so scarce?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois member should check his numbers, given that, in 2008, 82% of those who paid into EI were eligible. Furthermore, I would also remind the member that all employees, all long-tenured workers in the manufacturing, auto, mining and forestry sectors—all sectors hard hit by the economic crisis—are eligible for our program based on the criteria mentioned yesterday.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it will take more than piecemeal measures to fix an employment insurance system that is full of holes. The system needs to be completely overhauled if it is to meet the needs of workers. For example, the two-week waiting period must be eliminated immediately, the wage replacement rate must be increased from 55% to 60%, and the eligibility threshold must be reduced to 360 hours.

Why is the government refusing to act immediately?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have introduced several measures to help workers who lose their jobs.

Oral Questions

First of all, we have added five weeks. We added them at the end so people will receive more EI benefits during that difficult time. Second, we amended job sharing to allow more employees to take advantage of it and to help more employers. In addition, yesterday we introduced a measure for long-tenured workers and for those looking for retraining. Overall, the four measures I just mentioned will help over 750,000 workers who have lost their jobs.

* * *

[English]

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know the Prime Minister will meet with President Obama tomorrow and we assume the issue of climate change will be on that short agenda. It is vitally important.

We know the Prime Minister favours the increased production of tar sands oil and its export. He is supported in that by the leader of the Liberal Party.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Would it not be better to raise with President Obama the kinds of solutions that really will deal with climate change instead of proposing more export of dirty oil from the tar sands? What about the solutions instead of the more pollution?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment has been pursuing a clean energy dialogue with the United States for some time now. We are focused, as it is, not just on climate change particularly, but on those areas that need special attention, like the oil sands and coal-fired electricity in the United States, which is about 40 times bigger than the oil sands.

I would point out that we are committed to clean development of the oil sands, upon which many Canadians' jobs depend, including a number of NDP voters, or at least people who work there who used to be NDP voters.

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[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if nothing changes, Canada will withdraw its troops from Afghanistan in 2011. We know that President Obama is looking for more long-term commitments and support. The American President will bring up this topic. Can the Prime Minister assure Canadians that he will not make any commitments to keep troops in Afghanistan past 2011? Will he support calls by European leaders for a UN conference on Afghanistan to find a new direction?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's position is clear. The military mission will end in 2011. We are training the Afghan forces so that they can better defend their own country and work with our allies, including the Americans, on security and development in Afghanistan. President Obama is very committed to the mission in Afghanistan.

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[English]

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on August 27, the United States imposed a fishing moratorium on a 21,000 square kilometre area of the Beaufort Sea that falls well within Canadian boundaries. This is the largest encroachment on Canadian territory in our history as a country.

The Prime Minister had a photo op on a frigate in the Arctic, but will he really protect Canadian sovereignty by asking President Obama tomorrow to withdraw the fishing moratorium the United States has imposed on Canadian territory?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just to be clear, the territory question in the Beaufort Sea has been the subject of a territorial dispute between the United States and Canada for some time. Obviously we would like to find a resolution of that dispute, but in the meantime we will assert our right to enforce Canadian law in our territory.

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[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the protectionist measures in the *Buy American Act* are decimating Canadian jobs. Canadian exports to the U.S. have dropped by more than 35% this year. The *Buy American Act* has been in place for seven months and we are still waiting for Canada to be exempted.

Why are the Conservatives unable to obtain any concessions from the United States to protect Canadian workers?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, we came to an agreement with all the premiers in Canada. Now we can present this agreement to the Americans to show them that we will remain open to free trade and we will denounce protectionism.

I repeat that we now have people working with the Americans to find a solution based on the agreement that I presented to the American representatives last week.

[English]

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, seven months and no results from the government.

A recent CIBC report confirms that buy American is smothering Canadian growth. Canadian exports to the U.S. have plummeted 35% this year. Canadians cannot trust the Conservatives to protect Canadian jobs. Trade is clearly an area of federal responsibility, but the only leadership in Canada has come from provinces and municipalities.

Why have the Conservatives failed so miserably to protect Canadian jobs from American protectionism?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Prime Minister has shown leadership. We have shown leadership by bringing together premiers and territorial leaders from across the country.

In a somewhat unprecedented way and in a fairly short period of time, and we allowed them some months to do this, they came together with a procurement agreement, which I presented to the U.S. trade representative last week. He has appointed a chief negotiator and we have appointed a chief negotiator.

We are looking at this problem of buy American, which we frankly see as an element of protectionism. We want to see this turned around, and we are aggressively pursuing it in that direction.

* * *

● (1435)

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Yesterday the Prime Minister refused to answer why he allowed his ministers to abuse infrastructure funds they were responsible for simply to try and buy votes in their ridings and delay jobs for Canadians at the same time. While he sits silent, we find that more government ministers have had their hands into several cookie jars.

Would the Prime Minister care to explain today how the Minister of Finance managed to get for his university the highest per student grant in the province, eight times the per student share it ordinarily would have received?

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government put an unprecedented amount of money into science and technology and it did include \$2 billion into the knowledge infrastructure program. That \$2 billion was matched by provinces and the private sector. That amounted to almost \$5 billion into this economy, creating jobs right now in every community with a university or college.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I notice he did not say it was going fairly into every community with a university or college.

When the Minister of Finance said in his budget “measures that would target Canadians and communities most in need”, I guess what he forgot to tell Canadians was he really meant he would target those most in need of stimulus to vote Conservative.

Oral Questions

Of the infrastructure fund for British Columbia, the Conservatives took eight times as much money as opposition ridings on average. In Nova Scotia, the building Canada fund, they took 50% more funding for themselves.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Why should we trust the Conservatives when they are so busy looking after themselves?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is another day and another outrageous allegation from the member opposite.

Let me tell him how it works. Let us take a look at how it works in the province of Ontario, his province and mine. We sit down with the provincial Liberal government of Dalton McGuinty. We get applications and we make decisions.

On behalf of Premier Dalton McGuinty, I resent the accusation that Dalton McGuinty is involved in some sort of a vote swinging regime to help the Conservative Party. We are working well with Dalton McGuinty. We are working well with the Government of Ontario.

How dare he attack my premier.

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[*Translation*]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, over 3,000 people held a protest in Dolbeau-Mistassini to demand, among other things, that Ottawa take action to help them through the crisis in the forestry sector. The protest illustrates the discontent of Quebec's forestry regions, which are asking for assistance on a level similar to that provided to the auto industry, which is concentrated in Ontario.

Will the Conservative government implement our proposals, including loan guarantees and greater accessibility to employment insurance, as the CEP - FTQ is asking today?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I was in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region for a meeting with the rural university, and so I was able to attend that event. I did not at all feel what the member opposite just reported. The forestry issue in Quebec is a provincial jurisdiction and our government is doing more than what has been done in the past.

Thanks to all government stakeholders, we are investing over \$100 million to regenerate our forests in terms of silviculture and forest management. However, again, the Bloc Québécois voted against our action plan.

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, a Quebec coalition is calling for greater use of wood in public buildings. The Bloc Québécois introduced a bill to this effect for federal buildings.

How could the Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), who claims to want to help regions such as the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, let his Conservative colleagues vote against this measure at the Standing Committee on Industry?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as regards that same coalition in Quebec, many of its members benefited from the \$170 million in assistance, over two years, for research and for developing new products, as has been requested. Therefore, we are once again talking about concrete measures and, as I said, with regard to federal buildings, \$323 million will be invested over a two-year period to renovate these buildings. Obviously, this will result in an increase in the demand for wood. This is what we call concrete measures. We, on this side, are taking action.

* * *

● (1440)

JUSTICE

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebecers want us to send a clear message to people who commit economic crimes. Well before the recent events involving Vincent Lacroix and Earl Jones, the Bloc Québécois proposed abolishing the provisions that allow white-collar criminals in particular to be released after serving one-sixth of their sentences. We have succeeded in the meantime in building a consensus around this initiative.

Will the government act in good faith and allow the Bloc's bill—a simple bill with only two clauses—to pass today at all stages?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are certainly talking here about very serious crimes. The victims of white-collar criminals suffer terrible consequences. Even though these crimes may generally be seen as non-violent, the gravity of the effects can scarcely be imagined. Fortunately, the Minister of Justice announced today that he would introduce a bill imposing minimum sentences. We are taking action on this and hope the Bloc will support us because it is currently opposing our efforts to abolish suspended sentences that allow people to serve their time in the comfort of their homes after committing white-collar crimes. That is terrible.

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, before minimum sentences can be handed out, these people have to be caught and their crimes possibly prevented.

If we could quickly agree on abolishing release after one-sixth of the sentence, we could study other proposals for fighting economic crime. The Bloc Québécois has proposed establishing specialized squads that include professional accountants and financial experts to support the police officers who are responsible for finding white-collar criminals and getting them convicted.

Will the government set up these kinds of squads?

Oral Questions

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two years later I hear my colleague talking about additional squads. That is reassuring. Back in 2007, \$10 million were allocated to policing the markets. Last week the Bloc Québécois emerged and saw which way the wind was blowing, and it shows up now with a bill on parole. This bill has been quickly cobbled together and is incomplete.

I can assure the House that our government is working on reforms to release on parole, but there is no way we will put forward something that is improvised and incomplete. This is just political opportunism and it is shameful.

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[English]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, three months ago the Minister of Transport said, “Canadians don’t want a job-killing payroll tax increase”. Now that unemployment is approaching double digits the same Conservatives seem to believe a payroll tax increase is a great idea.

Why do the Conservatives insist on burdening workers and businesses with this job-killing Conservative tax hike?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is complaining about EI premiums and yet the Liberals want to spend billions on the 45-day work year that would cost a lot of money. They cannot have it both ways.

We have frozen the EI premiums for two years and established an arm's-length transparent body to set the rates in the future.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in an op-ed piece, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development wrote:

—a massive increase in job-killing payroll taxes that will hurt workers and small businesses alike.

The new tax burden the Conservatives are planning is \$13 billion. If it was a job killer in May, why is it the right policy today?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member did not hear me, but we froze the EI rates for two years. We do not increase taxes. We cut taxes in the billions of dollars. It is the leader of the Liberal Party who said that he plans to raise taxes when he spoke a few months ago.

* * *

TAXATION

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government has violated the trust of Canadians about taxes.

First, Conservatives raised income taxes. They broke their word. Then, they slapped a brutal new Conservative tax on income trusts, ripping \$25 billion from the savings of two million Canadians. Again, they broke their word. Now, they are going to slap this job-

killing Conservative tax on employment through higher EI premiums.

The Prime Minister used to say that was a dumb idea. Why is he breaking his word again? How can Canadians possibly trust these people?

• (1445)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they can trust us to reduce taxes because we have done that. It is that party that has raised taxes and spent billions of dollars.

On the one hand, the Liberals say, “Spend \$4 billion or more on EI”. On the other hand, they say, “Do not raise taxes”. They have to decide which way they are going on that.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the issue here is trust. Canadians simply cannot trust a government that so often fails to tell the truth.

The Prime Minister said that increasing EI premiums was dumb. He promised that he would never raise taxes on anything. Conservatives also said, “There is no greater fraud than a promise not kept”.

Why are they slapping a new Conservative tax on jobs? Using the Conservatives' own words, would that be a fraud because it would be a promise unkept?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians can trust us as the party that cuts taxes. What we have on the other side is a party that proposes carbon taxes when it is convenient for it. It is a party that spends billions and raises taxes. Then, it comes around and tries to change it the other way.

That party is trying to have an election simply for opportunistic purposes. It has nothing to do with the right interests of Canadians. We will stand behind Canadians.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all members of the House have had an opportunity over the summer to speak to their constituents about the actions of their party and their leader. I know that Conservative members of the House sought the opinions of their constituents on our government's crime agenda, an agenda that ensures that the rights of law-abiding Canadians and victims trump the rights of criminals.

Could the Minister of Justice explain the details of our government's comprehensive crime agenda and how that agenda could be derailed by an unwanted and completely unnecessary election?

Oral Questions

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have spoken with many Canadians who are very supportive of our tough on crime agenda. I pointed out to them that we have introduced bills that crack down on identity theft, car theft, getting rid of double credit for time served, and the faint hope clause. I pointed out Bill C-15, the bill that would crack down on serious drug dealers.

I have challenged the Liberals to get this passed, but getting tough on crime has never been a priority for the Liberal Party. This is why I say that the only party one can count on to stand up for victims and law-abiding Canadians is this Conservative Party and this Conservative government.

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NORTEL

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, laid off Nortel workers continue to be denied their pensions and benefits. A petition with 17,000 names on it has been presented in the House, calling on the government to amend legislation to put a stop to this atrocious situation.

While larger commercial creditors get settlements, workers are told to go to the back of the line and keep their fingers crossed that there will be something left for them after the big creditors have been paid.

Will the Minister of Finance stand up for Canadian workers and enact legislation to protect the pensions of hard-working Canadians?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is undoubtedly aware that many of the pension issues to which he refers are actually provincial issues within the realm of provincial legislatures.

When it comes to bankruptcy proceedings, however, this House has already opined on that issue and we are looking forward to enacting those regulations.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear that, but I wish we had had that kind of leadership before because this House passed that legislation unanimously and we did not hear from the government.

Therefore, I would like to know from the government, from the minister, when those people who are out standing, waiting for support from their government, which we have seen from the British and the American governments, will get the phone call to say, "Your government is here for you. Your benefits are on their way and you are going to get protection for your pension, for your severance and for your LTD".

When is that day going to come and when is that phone call going to be made by the minister?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, many of the issues to which the hon. member refers are within the realm of provincial competency and provincial legislatures. However, this House did pass a bill, in fact, two parts of the bill, over two Parliaments and indeed, we are looking forward to enacting those regulations forthwith.

• (1450)

[*Translation*]

CANADA-US RELATIONS

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister announced that he will meet with the American President tomorrow. There will be a number of topics up for discussion, but the one that the Prime Minister cannot avoid is the subject of Omar Khadr, a Canadian citizen and child soldier who has been detained at Guantanamo for seven years.

Does the Prime Minister plan on calling for the repatriation of Omar Khadr, the last western citizen still being held at Guantanamo, when he meets with the American President?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Tomorrow, the Prime Minister will meet with the American President. Obviously, Canada's interests are on the agenda. The topics of discussion will include security, Afghanistan, as well as the economy in general.

On August 14, a split decision was rendered by the Federal Court of Appeal. The government decided to appeal this decision to the Supreme Court.

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the issue with the United States does not necessarily have to do with the Buy American Act, but with the President's economic stimulus plan, which requires municipalities and states to use only American products to be eligible for the federal program, which automatically eliminates competition from companies in Quebec and Canada.

Does the Prime Minister plan on taking advantage of his meeting with President Obama to ask him to relax the rules of this program, so that companies here can continue to offer their products as part of the program?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week I met with mayors and other leaders from municipalities across Canada. I explained our plan regarding protectionism in the United States. I got the support of the mayors to continue with our plan. They will look at it and show it. We will continue to work together to convey our message against protectionism in the United States.

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YOUTH

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, young Canadians have been hit harder than anyone by this recession. In fact, nearly half of all Canadians who have lost their jobs are under 25. Yet Canada needs these young people to build a brighter, more prosperous future for us all.

How can this government justify having no short-term plan or long-term vision to help our youth?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have invested \$20 million over two years to help summer students have jobs. We have created 40,000 jobs this summer alone. There was \$15 million for the YMCA for youth internships and \$20 million for federal public service student employment. We are investing in students and we are ensuring that they have jobs when they need them.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite all the nice words, because of this recession students across our country found it extremely difficult to find summer jobs to help pay for their education. In fact, youth unemployment is at 20%, more than twice the national average.

I met with a group of students today from across the country and they listed all the ways these Conservatives have failed them. How can we trust the government to create the jobs of tomorrow if it will not even give young Canadians a chance today?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not only have we created jobs for young people but we have also provided grants for them to go back to school. We have provided grants of \$250 per month for those with low incomes and \$100 per month for those with higher incomes.

Here is what the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations had to say. It is “pleased to see that the Canada Student Grant Program and the Repayment Assistance Plan...are aimed at giving students access to a post-secondary education and alleviating debt repayment upon graduation, respectively”. This was June of 2009. We are taking steps on many fronts and we are helping many more students than that party did when it was in government.

* * *

• (1455)

*[Translation]***HEALTH**

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the A (H1N1) flu is expected to hit even harder in October. Some 74 people have already died from this flu virus. We need to act now. The minister plans to reveal her priority list for the flu vaccine a little later this week, but we want to know now whether first nations and Inuit people are on that list, since they are at a much greater risk.

My question is very simple. Can the minister tell us whether aboriginal people are on the government's list of priorities?

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear that every Canadian who wants to receive the vaccine will receive it. The vaccine rollout is currently being developed. A special advisory committee made up of chief medical officers is working on that and I expect that vaccine rollout document to be released some time this week.

We are working with the provinces and territories to ensure that all Canadians who want to receive the vaccine will be able to do so.

[Translation]

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, does the minister realize that “A (H1N1)” is not a postal code?

[English]

We have a serious problem on our hands. At the symposium in Winnipeg two weeks ago, leading epidemiologists in this country said that first nations and Inuit people are 25 times more likely to contract H1N1.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, is the government going to stop the bureaucratise and this dilly-dallying with respect to first nations and Inuit people and act now?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only party that thinks H1N1 is a postal code is that party.

Our goal is to ensure the balance between the needs and the speed of the timing of the vaccine. We are gathering as much information as we can on the vaccine to ensure that it is safe and effective for all Canadians. Thanks to the actions of Health Canada, we will be able to approve that vaccine quickly and all Canadians who want to receive the vaccine will be able to do so.

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TRADE

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition claims that the government has given China and India the cold shoulder on trade, but nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the Liberal record speaks for itself. Despite being 13 years in power, the Liberals made no progress on trade with these countries. Furthermore, they completed only three free trade agreements and none after 2002.

Could the Minister of International Trade please tell the House how our government's record on trade with China and India compares to the dismal Liberal record?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague not just for the question but for the help that she has given, especially related to our India trade.

I have just a quick short list. In past months, we have had 14 members of Parliament and ministers visit China, including myself and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. We have invested \$2.5 billion into the Asia-Pacific corridor to help the flow of goods to Asia. There are six new trade offices in China and three more in India, which brings us up to eight.

The Prime Minister has started negotiations with the EU in terms of free trade agreements. We are having discussions with India right now in terms of trade. There is a foreign investment protection and nuclear co-operation agreement in progress. There are more FTAs on the way. We are doing quite a bit, more than those guys ever did.

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THE ECONOMY

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, government have long urged Canadians to save for retirement. Mechanics, teachers, bus drivers and others, including former Nortel employees, have done just that.

However, the Conservatives have failed to act in the face of a recession that has eroded retirement savings for many people. With their sorry record on income trusts, the Conservatives clearly have no credibility.

How can Canadians trust the Conservative government to protect their savings today when it denies that there is even a problem?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the economic action plan we have probably the largest innovation in savings for Canadians since the RRSP in the 1950s and that is the tax free savings account. This will revolutionize savings in Canada. All Canadians are eligible to participate. There is good take-up across the country and it will be even more important year after year as more and more Canadians invest in tax free savings accounts and earn interest tax free.

* * *

• (1500)

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, five months before the opening of the 2010 Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver, the Commissioner of Official Languages is concerned about the ability of the federal government and the organizing committee to provide services in French.

The ten or so federal institutions evaluated in today's report have shown "dismal results", according to Graham Fraser. Of the points of service under airport authority responsibility that are designated as bilingual, only 10% are bilingual.

What is this government waiting for to fulfill its legal obligations to francophones?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. The 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games will be completely bilingual.

Today, Graham Fraser himself said that the government as well as VANOC "...have taken a number of measures to ensure that both of Canada's official languages are fully reflected during the Games".

I appreciate the question because it gives me the opportunity to point out that our government today announced new funding of \$7.7 million to ensure that the Olympic Games will be completely bilingual and will respect Canada's official languages.

Our Conservative government is keeping its promises.

Oral Questions

[English]

TRANSPORT

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, air safety inspectors at Transport Canada are so strapped for travel costs they have had to secretly dip into a budget meant for the Mackenzie Valley pipeline.

The transport minister has said that he will look into this misuse of public funds, but that misses the point. Transport Canada wants out of the flight safety business and is underfunding the work of its safety inspectors. This is the real issue.

Will the minister call an inquiry into whether Transport Canada is living up to its responsibility to ensure Canadians are safe when they fly our airs?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at Transport Canada we take our obligations for the safety of the travelling public very seriously. There is an important public role for the government in this area and we take it very seriously and will continue to do so.

Just in the budget this year, the Minister of Finance provided literally hundreds of millions of dollars of new resources to my portfolio to assist in ensuring that we live up to those obligations.

Safety is something that is very important in our civil aviation sector and one on which we will continue to put great priority.

* * *

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier today, the Minister of Justice announced our government's plans to introduce legislation to combat white-collar crime in our country.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice explain what his government plans to do about this serious problem and how it plans to protect victims of these crimes?

Mr. Daniel Petit (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, white-collar crime is a problem that our government has always taken very seriously. Remember the sponsorship scandal. As the Minister of Justice announced this morning, we will create mandatory jail sentences for those who commit serious fraud, add aggravating factors to justify longer sentences, and ask the courts to consider restitution orders.

The opposition says that it supports our tough approach to crime. That is a laugh. Off camera, it does everything it can to block, delay and eviscerate our legislation.

Government Orders

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I wish to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of three distinguished visitors: the Hon. Rosemary Mathurin, Speaker of the House of Assembly of Saint Lucia; the Hon. Juan Fernando Cordero Cueva, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Republic of Ecuador; and the Hon. Joan Purcell, Speaker of the Senate of Grenada.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

● (1505)

[Translation]

POINTS OF ORDER

CORRECTIONS ACT

The Speaker: The hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin on a point of order.

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for unanimous consent to adopt the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-434, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (day parole — six months or one sixth of the sentence rule), be deemed to have been read a second time and referred to a committee of the whole, deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage and deemed read a third time and passed.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no agreement.

Would the hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin like to rise on another point of order?

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I would like to know who refused unanimous consent.

The Speaker: The Speaker does not look at who is speaking. I heard “no” answers, and that concludes the matter. I regret to inform the hon. member, but I am sure that he knows.

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, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-23. I join with many of my colleagues in our attempt to deal with an amendment which would deny second reading to the bill at this point because of the failure of the government to follow procedure when it comes to the development of such an important endeavour.

The amendment moved by the Bloc and the subamendment by the NDP speak to the importance of the work of the committee which was engaged in the discussions around a free trade agreement with Colombia.

It is paramount that the issues have full examination. We have heard the debate. We have heard the divergence of views that exist on this issue. This bill is not well understood by the Canadian public. It is not accepted by many people within the Canadian public. Groups and organizations have spoken out vociferously against it. I have been receiving emails for months from individuals who would like this free trade deal stopped. I have received countless letters from my constituents on the subject.

This issue needs much further examination. The minister has pushed this bill forward without proper examination and without proper analysis. The result is that today in the House of Commons we are speaking to an amendment that would block the bill moving forward at second reading.

Why is this amendment important, and why do I support it? We have broken with our democratic practices. We are not fully taking into account the process for examination of significant legislation.

As well, we need to give full weight to evidence from civil society. That will not happen before the committee has completed its work, completed its evidentiary gathering, written its report and presented it to the House of Commons. Those steps are missing. They make up an absence of understanding around this particular bill.

Without that report in front of the government, the government will not be required to do a proper analysis on the legislation regarding the free trade deal. It has not done an analysis on many of the free trade deals that have come before this Parliament over the last year and a half. It is patently absurd that we enter into free trade deals based on ideology. I would like to turn that argument around on the Liberals and Conservatives who keep coming after us saying that we are against free trade and that we are standing up over and over again based on ideology.

The government is supporting free trade based on ideology, not on the analysis of the impact of the deal on the particular sectors that are going to be affected, not on the analysis of free trade arrangements as they have impacted Canadian society. That work has not been done. That work will not be done if the Conservative government and the Liberal opposition continue to support free trade on an ideological basis rather than on a practical and pragmatic basis.

Government Orders

The amendment as it stands is important. It takes away from the government the right to bring this bill forward without the kind of work that needs to be done. That is why NDP members and Bloc members are standing up to speak to this amendment over and over again. We want to see Parliament work correctly. We want to see Parliament work for all Canadians. We want legislators to act with a rational and reasoned approach based on correct analysis rather than a simple ideological commitment to free trade.

● (1510)

I will now turn to the larger issue of the essential elements that would be involved in a free trade arrangement with Colombia. This is something that has occupied much of the debate and I certainly will add to it.

Why does Colombia want a free trade deal? Why is it that Colombia is pushing for a free trade deal with Canada? Is it that the free trade arrangement it was looking for with the United States has been unsuccessful? Is that why the emphasis is on Canada now? Is it hoping to go through the back door to get what it wants? Is that what is going on with this deal? Is that why the emphasis has been on moving ahead with this free trade arrangement rather than taking the appropriate steps, rather than doing the proper analysis? We are creating an opportunity not only for Colombia to move ahead with the free trade deal but put pressure on U.S. legislators right now who, quite clearly, are asking why they would want to support a free trade deal with a country that does not meet the minimum standards of labour and environmental practices, of common decency toward its society. There is a lack of criminal action at the highest level within Colombia. The Colombian government for all intents and purposes has been led by quasi-criminals for the past dozen years. It has an incredibly bad record when it comes to dealing with its citizens. It has a record of turning a blind eye to the most malignant forms of oppression that occur in any part of South America and Central America.

Conservative members have talked about the improvement in the number of people who have been killed in Colombia. They have talked about the improvement in the number of trade union people who have been killed. Do they not think that the wholesale slaughter of trade union members over the past dozen years has led to people taking their own steps to avoid repression, to avoid being killed? That government in Colombia and its leadership has taken so many actions against people that people have had to be very circumspect in how they deal in their own society. Is that not more likely the case? The repression that has occurred for so many years in that country has now played out to a point where the number of murders committed by death squads and the number of potential victims has been reduced. That is what has brought down the numbers, I am sure. It stands to reason.

With that society and that repression, the Conservatives talk about going into a free trade agreement. They say that things are improving.

Do we not have a minimum standard that we should apply to any country before we enter into a preferred trade arrangement with that country?

It is not good enough to talk about improvement in the number of people killed. We need to examine the nature of the society that we

are proposing to link up with. That is the kind of analysis the Conservative government has not done and will not do, because it does not believe anything should stand in the way of free trade.

The U.S. Congress has a different point of view. The members of Congress are not NDPers. We join with our colleagues in the United States in standing up against this proposed free trade arrangement,

Mr. Speaker, I see that I am running out of time. I am sure there will be many other New Democrats who will stand to continue this argument, because this argument is important to Canada, it is important to this Parliament and it is important to the people of Colombia as well.

● (1515)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague's speech in terms of the fundamental question about what our obligation as legislators in Canada is to ensure full development of the Canadian economy and certain international standards of development.

My colleague kept raising the issue of ideological blinders on the Conservative Party. The Conservatives believe that the free movement of capital wherever, however, with whomever, is the only issue. It is a kind of hoodoo mysticism. They believe that as long as capital does what it wants, everything else will be fine.

We are talking about a murderous regime with a horrific record on human rights. Our colleagues in the United States, who in the past have supported some very murderous regimes, have raised clear objections. Clear objections have been raised to the Conservative government and yet it does not seem to have any interest whatsoever in addressing the serious abuses that are international in scope.

The Conservatives have thrown up this narrow fig leaf of respectability. They say that while fewer people are being killed now than before, that is an improvement. If we look at the history of Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua under the death squads, at a certain point there are not all that many people left to kill. The corollary to that is the fact that if enough examples are made out of people, it is hard to get other people to take their place. That is why they are called terror killings.

The whole point of terror killings is to make examples of people in villages, communities, factories and mines. An individual will be killed if he or she steps out of line. Mass murder does not have to be continued year after year to make it work. Examples just have to be made.

Even though we are hearing about fewer people being killed, we are still hearing about gross violations of human rights. This is only indicative that the policy of that outlaw regime is suppressing the basic rights and developments of the country.

Government Orders

Given the immense interest of the Canadian oil and gas sector and the Canadian mining sector in getting into Colombia to get at deposits, and the fact that the Conservative government is showing no interest whatsoever in establishing standards for human rights norms, what expectations does my colleague have that there will be any obligation on any company, Canadian, Chinese, whatever, going into Colombia to exploit its resources to have any obligation whatsoever to ensure that the communities affected will have some basic level of protection?

• (1520)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, that is a question that leads me to support the amendment in front of us.

We do not have the answer. We do not have the answer that says these are the rules that are going to drive development within the country. We cannot have the answer because this Parliament has not done a fulsome and complete dissection of that society to understand what kind of society we are entering into an agreement with.

Parliamentarians took a trip to Colombia. I have heard a variety of views about that trip. That trip was very carefully managed. Obviously that trip spoke to individuals who wanted to carry forward the government's message. When they were not speaking to those types of folks, the people who were being interviewed in some cases were almost terrified for their lives. Parliamentarians reported back on these things.

Where do we find the justification, the understanding of the society, to put forward a free trade deal which would bring our companies into the region under rules that are not comprehensible to Canadians and to Canadian businesses? We are putting our businesses at risk here. We are not doing them a favour in the long run. We are causing them potential grief.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to this very important debate on the free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia, trade not only brings economic opportunities, it brings dialogue between them. It brings ideals, beliefs and what they have in common. This trade agreement is very important. We have seen other trade agreements around the world, such as the NAFTA with Canada, the U.S. and Mexico, and how it forged our countries together, not only in trade but in our relationships with each other.

Very recently we went on a Middle East tour with the foreign affairs committee, and we talked to the people of Jordan. Jordan has a free trade agreement with Israel and Egypt. Those countries get along. They get along mostly because they are trading with each other. They are relying upon each other for exports and imports.

Regarding the European Union, with all the centuries of strife in Europe, one of the reasons it works so well in Europe is because they are traders now. It is very important that trade is happening around the world because it makes different societies and different nations get along.

Seven years ago, when I was on the trade committee, we went through South America. It was quite an eye-opener to see the potential in this region. We were there at the time we already had a free trade agreement with Chile. Our exports to Chile, such as paper

products and airplane parts, increased when we had a deal with Chile, and we started buying products from it.

I remember that tour. We went all through those South American countries. With the ones that we had agreements with, especially Peru and Chile, there was a tremendous amount of trade. As well, air routes were open between those two countries, so there was a lot of dialogue.

We really should be looking at the potential for buying more products from Colombia. It is very strategic. We are in the northern hemisphere and we cannot get certain products here that it can provide. Right now we have SNC-Lavalin from Canada setting up shop there. There is so much we can gain.

A couple of years ago, when I was responsible for emerging economies in the previous government, I toured all these countries, especially the emerging economies in Asia. I saw how their economies were increasing and expanding, and it was mostly because of trade.

I visited the eastern European countries. After the Iron Curtain came down, we saw Poland, Romania and Hungary doing more trade with the rest of the world. Their economies got better. Their social networks got better. Even the labour laws got better in these countries because of trade.

We should not be so afraid of having a free trade agreement with Colombia. It is going to be very good for both countries.

We have to think of the situation right now in South America. Venezuela is strong-arming Colombia. It is helping with the guerrillas who are fighting the Colombian government. We should help Colombia break away from its dependence on Venezuela and the few countries it is trading with. We have to do trade with Colombia, because if it stays in the situation, it will constantly have strife and its economy will not expand.

We are not the first country to sign a free trade agreement with Colombia. I mentioned the European Union, which already has a trade agreement with Colombia. The countries of the European Union are all democratic countries. They have very vibrant trade unions. They are committed to human rights. They see the merit of having a free trade agreement with Colombia. If they have seen the merit and gone through all the hoops, we should be looking at it.

• (1525)

We see other countries stepping up to the plate to do trade with Colombia, such as the Scandinavian countries, Britain, the Netherlands, France and Germany. They are all helping Colombia prosper. There is a saying about prosperity, that people will flourish when things are happening, business is good, and people have jobs. But when people do not have jobs and economies are bad, it is very hard, especially on young people.

I remember visiting Syria. Syria and Cuba are boxed in and they do not have a lot of trade. There are a lot of young people in the streets who are not working. They do not see any hope in trade or business. They do not see any future. Many times in these countries, and it has happened in Colombia, they fall for the other side of the economy. That is not good. In Colombia, it is narcotics. A lot of young people have nowhere else to work but in those industries.

Government Orders

A lot of countries that do not have trade agreements and are not trading with the rest of the world are boxed in. They have a lot of young people. It brings nothing but strife and they cannot move forward. It is very important that we are one of the leaders on the trade agreement with Colombia.

Canadians are traders. We are one of the biggest countries in the world, with one of the world's smallest populations, and look at how much trade we do in a day. We are importing almost \$1 billion and exporting almost \$1.5 billion a day. When we look at the world, those numbers are tremendous for a small population of 30 million people. However, we are traders. We believe in trade, and we have to show leadership.

For 40 years, Colombia has been paralyzed and divided. They have been desperate. There is violence. Legitimate trade, not trade in narcotics, is what will bring Colombians out of it. We have to foster that trade and we have to help them.

I was talking to the member for Kings—Hants, who mentioned that even the U.S. is making a trade deal. The NDP talks about labour standards and how bad they are in Colombia. The member for Kings—Hants was there, and he said they have the strongest and best labour standards in the world. The biggest problem is that they do not have enough inspectors on the ground to make sure those rules are followed. Canada is helping them fund their labour inspectors so they can fulfill and push those rules.

We should not have a free trade agreement *carte blanche*. We should have labour laws and human rights attached to it. That is the way we should look at it. There is no reason we cannot. We have done this with other trade agreements.

It would be best to move the bill forward to the trade committee. I have been on the trade committee and I know how it works. Committee members are very efficient and they move fast. They will go through the legislation quickly. Let us dissect it and make sure those things are in place that some Canadians are concerned about.

Instead of stopping the legislation from moving forward, NDP members should be thinking about the people of Colombia. They should be thinking of companies like SNC-Lavalin that are working there. They should be thinking about the products we could pull out of Colombia that could make our lifestyle better, whether it is cut flowers, coffee or many of the produce items that we cannot grow in the winter. These are all reasons to move forward with the legislation.

There have been quite a few speakers over the last few days. There was a lot of information brought out, but some of it was misinformation. We should correct that for the record. We should look at this free trade agreement, because Canada is a leader in free trade agreements. It should not stop there, and we should help it move forward.

• (1530)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the speakers from the Liberal Party on this issue for the last couple of days, and we certainly have a variety of views. The member for Mississauga South gave a very reasoned argument yesterday about why members should oppose this

agreement but he seems to have been counteracted by members of his party who are in favour of it.

I wonder how far the Liberal members would want to go. If they are prepared to sign a free trade agreement with Colombia, would they sign a free trade agreement with North Korea? At what point do we have to ask for an independent analysis and study, and what is the harm of that?

Why not take a little longer, do a study on human rights, rather than rushing forward and joining government members who seem to be determined to sign a free trade agreement at all costs, as quickly as possible. The United States Congress has held back. The Obama administration has held back on endorsing this agreement, as has the British government. Both of these countries are our allies in the world, in Afghanistan and other places. The British government has pulled back on its military aid to the country because of human rights abuses. Certainly the killings are not decreasing, as the Conservatives are suggesting, so why—

The Deputy Speaker: I will cut off the hon. member to allow the member for Sydney—Victoria a chance to respond.

Hon. Mark Eyking: Mr. Speaker, the dialogue is interesting. I was talking to the member for Kings—Hants, who has just been down to Washington. The Obama administration is fully in favour of this trade agreement. I do not know where members opposite are getting their numbers or what is happening in the U.S., but it is fully in favour of it.

The member brought up North Korea. North Korea has nuclear weapons of mass destruction, whereas here we are helping a country get out of trading narcotics. We are helping a country step forward. How can members make that comparison with North Korea? It is mind boggling.

Going back to where we stand on this side of the House, I come here as the member of Parliament for Cape Breton who was a business person, who traded with these countries and traded all over the world. I know how important trade is for Canadians. I know important trade is for those young people in Colombia who are going to move forward. The proper way to go is to put the bill before committee and let the committee go through it.

But to the NDP, which is against every free trade agreement and believes we can somehow trade among ourselves and survive in this country, where would we buy the oranges and the coffee?

Government Orders

● (1535)

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want my colleague to discuss the situation on this free trade agreement and our party's position, versus the position of the NDP which was brought up earlier. The confusing part was with respect to the earlier speaker. They want to study it further when in fact they want to do what the NDP used to use, which was the wrecking ball diplomacy type of action. Lately NDP members have been a little more collegial, and I do not know what compels that, but in this case we are certainly arguing for further study on this.

Also, because the member does have an agricultural background, I would like him to talk about some of the sectors that will benefit from this free trade deal with Colombia.

Hon. Mark Eyking: Mr. Speaker, the area of Newfoundland and Labrador is also a big trader, in fish products, oil and gas and also from the mines.

From my perspective, I was a trader before I went into politics. I did business in these countries and I could see the difference. When they start buying and selling goods, people start visiting these countries. They learn ideas. It is more than just money. It is that thing that happens between countries. What better way to open our doors to Colombians visiting Canada than to teach them how our laws, infrastructure and social networks work and show them the way.

The important fact was brought up that we are not passing this bill today. We are bringing the bill to committee, and that is the best place to tidy it up.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the words of the member for Sydney—Victoria and his insight and expertise in this regard.

I am honoured today to speak to the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, Bill C-23, for some very good reasons as I will outline. Not just for the benefit of the great Kenora riding but for regions across Canada this is another important step in opening up trade throughout the world.

Canada is taking action during these difficult economic times by reaching out to our trade partners in reducing barriers to trade. This is not just about Latin America. This agreement provides Canadian companies with a competitive edge in many sectors, including wheat and paper products, which in northwestern Ontario, in the great Kenora riding, we feel we have an advantage in this regard. Mining is another strong economic driver in the great Kenora riding, as well as oil and gas, engineering and information technology.

These are just some of the examples of the government's efforts to strengthen our own economy and deepen Canada's presence in Latin America.

I understand some of the concerns outlined by our colleagues. Labour and environmental standards are important. However, labour and environmental standards are addressed within this free trade agreement. The side agreement with Colombia on labour and the environment will help ensure that this free trade agreement advances the cause of human rights and environmental protection in both countries.

The labour provisions commit all parties to this agreement to respect and enforce standards such as the elimination of child labour, freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively.

Environmental provisions will help protect and conserve the environment in those sectors where our country is active.

[*Translation*]

Obviously, during these tough economic times, it is more important than ever to open up new markets for Canadian companies. That is why our government has negotiated new free trade agreements, like this one with Colombia that we are debating today.

This agreement will create new jobs for Canadians and for Colombians as well. There are very strict labour and environmental standards included in this agreement. These standards help guarantee that these agreements will help advance the cause of human rights and the protection of the environment in the country. Colombia cannot make progress if we isolate it. We believe that political involvement, development assistance and free trade are all key to achieving success in Colombia.

● (1540)

[*English*]

Over the past six years, the personal situation of the vast majority of Colombians has improved. Illegal armed groups have been weakened and that progress is acknowledged by global communities and international organizations that are present in Colombia.

The February 2008 report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights in Colombia stated:

[It must be] recognized that Colombia has made progress in restoring security throughout the country in recent years, and the visibility given to human rights in the public agenda is a solid achievement

While important progress has been made, the Government of Canada continues to recognize that there are challenges in the overall human rights situation in Colombia. However, it is important to look at some interesting recent history, the context in which this agreement has arisen and the key content of the agreement that helps to serve some of the concerns we have heard from members of different political stripes in the House today and those that concern us as well.

In 2007 two-way merchandise trade between Canada and Colombia totalled more than \$1.1 billion. That is significant by anyone's standards. It is certainly an important part of our history. Between 2005 and 2007, Canada provided over \$33 million in development assistance to Colombia, mostly to address the rights of these vulnerable populations, which concern us not just in Colombia but throughout the world.

Articles 1603 and 1604 in chapter 16 of the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement set out the two countries' objectives and obligations with respect to labour. Annex 2 of the parallel agreement on labour co-operation sets out a maximum fine of \$15 million for failing to respect the obligations set out in the agreement.

Government Orders

It is worth noting that the international labour agreement represents the highest grade of labour standards. The labour agreement covers the right to freedom of association, collective bargaining, the abolition of child labour, the elimination of discrimination, providing protections for occupational safety and health and minimum employment standards such as minimum wage and overtime pay.

Things are improving in Colombia right now. Colombia's social and security improvements since 2002 under the Uribe government are getting better. Between 2002 and 2008, kidnappings decreased by 87%. Homicide rates dropped by 44%. Moderate poverty has dropped from 55% to 45%. Colombia has attained coverage of 94% in basic education and 31% in higher education. These are important achievements.

We have an obligation to be there vis-à-vis this trade relationship to help it further its causes in these important areas. As a registered nurse, this is something that is close to home. We recognize that some form of health system currently covers 90.4% of the population, while the population subsidized by the state has doubled over the last five years to 23 million people. Universal health care coverage is expected in 2010.

I would submit that with solidified relationships, again vis-à-vis this free trade agreement and other important activities in which we engage in Latin America and Colombia, we can hopefully show them the way. Having advanced the cause of universal health care for some time now, we are leaders in the world with respect to providing some of the best universally accessed health care coverage in the world.

The Canadian International Development Agency is continuing with important ongoing assistance. Between 2006 and 2008, CIDA provided more than \$32 million for projects and initiatives in Colombia. Since 1972, the total amount of CIDA contributions is \$355 million.

• (1545)

There are more than 350,000 internally displaced persons with comprehensive protection and access to base social services in that country and training programs for more than 12,000 civil servants in the new Colombian law, on children and adolescents.

There are several other examples of how we are working in important areas. We have talked about health, education, improving conditions and outcomes for poverty and our relationships in these regards.

Through this free trade agreement, I am confident we will be able to continue to strengthen and build on this important relationship, not just in Colombia but throughout Latin America and other parts of the world. These kinds of free trade agreements would benefit not just Canada or the great Kenora riding but also the countries that we engage with in these important trading relationships.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member, as well as others today. I have also read through the material and they have convinced me that the right way to go is to adopt this free trade agreement.

A number of constituents in my riding of Kitchener—Conestoga have approached me or have written to me about concerns regarding this agreement. The concerns generally revolve around the area of corporate social responsibility and the labour agreement as it relates to child labour, occupational safety and health concerns and the employment standards.

I know the member commented on those. Could he assure the people in my riding and Canadians in general that in fact these points are very clearly covered in this free trade agreement?

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question. As I highlighted in my speech, these are important principles not just in terms of how we do business in Canada but the image that we will put out on the world stage when we engage in trade agreements with other parts of North America, Latin America, South America and borders beyond.

It is imperative that we carry these core principles, the same ones we have here with respect to labour standards, with respect to protecting children's interests in terms of being exploited through labour and with respect to environmental protection, ensuring that we carry out the same kinds of activities by standards here in those countries. This trade agreement gives us an opportunity to lead by example and work with these countries in developing important standards in the regards that the hon. member has pointed out.

• (1550)

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the majority of the questions and comments have been around human rights and it is very appropriate. I sit on the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, so it is certainly paramount in my mind as well.

However, there has been less talk about the competitiveness of Canada and the need for us to continue to go down the bilateral free trade agreement route to ensure we have lots of partners that have common interests, so we can help them prosper while we prosper rather than having only the one venue, the World Trade Organization, to rely on for our trade.

My colleague has done such a great job at elucidating on why the free trade agreement with Colombia is so beneficial. How will these bilateral agreements specifically benefit us in the future and why is it necessary for us to say yes to them and more free trade agreements in the future?

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, in response to the member's question, these bilateral agreements are particularly important. It gives us an opportunity to break through, to get into the countries where we can have relationships that highlight some of the strengths of our economy. Things like wheat, as I had mentioned, paper products, mining, oil and gas, energy production, engineering and information technology are all important activities in which we are world leaders.

It is fair to say that we consider ourselves to be among the world's top people in many of these categories, if not at least near the top. By entering into these bilateral trade agreements, we focus on a relationship that can be productive between two countries and really maximize or optimize the value for both countries and ensure more direct relationships. As I said earlier, they benefit both countries in so many ways.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Nicolas Dufour (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will speak today to Bill C-23. A number of Bloc Québécois members have spoken before me to say just how opposed we are to this free trade agreement.

We must make no mistake and most certainly not fall into the demagoguery of the Conservatives. We in the Bloc, unlike the NDP, support free trade agreements, except that we favour agreements that are well prepared, well structured and concluded with countries with which we will have a useful exchange and a real advantage in doing business.

The Conservative government's prime motivation for concluding this free trade agreement has nothing to do with trade. On the contrary, it has to do with investments. As the agreement contains a chapter on investment protection, it will make life easier for Canadians investing in Colombia, especially in mining.

One reason the Liberal Party proposed a bill on the social responsibility of mining companies is that they have a huge problem in Latin America—and we have seen this repeatedly—establishing a minimum of decorum and respecting the environment and local populations. I will come back to this.

Colombia's human rights record is one of the worst in the world and certainly in Latin America. In order to promote human rights in the world, governments generally use the carrot and the stick. They support efforts to improve respect for human rights and reserve the right to withdraw benefits should the situation worsen. With the conclusion of this free trade agreement, the Conservative government will deprive itself of extraordinary means to improve the economy and human rights in regions greatly in need of such improvement.

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

As for the free trade agreement itself, the Bloc Québécois is not prepared to trade the ability of the government to exert pressure to promote respect for human rights for the ability of Canadian companies to invest abroad.

I will provide a few figures to discuss Colombia's investment with Quebec. Imports for 2008 amounted to \$88 million. This figure is half a per cent lower than that of 2007. Quebec's imports from Colombia represent some 14% of Canada's overall imports. Exports in 2008 amounted to \$120 million, which represents 17% of Canada's exports to Colombia. Quebec's exports increased by slightly less than 2% over 2007. This means that Colombia is fifth in terms of Canada's exports to Latin America and the Caribbean. It is seventh in terms of imports from this region. This means that Canada has much more favoured trading partners than Colombia. Here lies the interest. Why conclude such a botched free trade agreement with Colombia, when we have far more attractive partners in Latin America? The Conservative government, however, wants

nothing to do with these alleged parties, such as Brazil and Venezuela, which are far too leftist or socialist for its tastes.

In recent years, trade between Canada and other Latin American countries has increased considerably, reducing trade with Colombia proportionately compared with other countries in the region.

Canada's main exports are cars and car parts, along with grains, which affects only western Canada. There is absolutely no advantage for Quebec. In 2007, those exports totaled 23% and 19% respectively. The vast majority of Canadian investments in Colombia are in the mining sector, which, as I was saying earlier, is facing serious ethical problems in terms of the environment.

In light of this information regarding trade between Canada, Quebec and Colombia, we in the Bloc Québécois are having a very hard time understanding why Canada would want to sign a free trade agreement with Colombia.

● (1555)

When two countries enter into free trade agreements, it usually means they are special trading partners who trade sufficiently to make it worthwhile to lower tariff and trade barriers. Proof of this lies in the fact that Quebecers were the greatest advocates of the free trade agreement with the United States in the 1980s. In particular, the former Premier of Quebec, Bernard Landry, comes to mind. He was a major supporter of the Canada-U.S. free trade agreement for one, very simple reason, namely, that Canada and the United States have always enjoyed a very good trade relationship benefiting both sides. We are talking about two countries with very similar economies overall, which facilitates a certain degree of synergy. Therefore Canada, and Quebec in particular, stood to gain a great deal from doing business with the Americans without any tariffs.

In this situation, we have to admit that, quite frankly, the Colombian market is not a very big one, and that trade between Canada and Colombia is extremely limited compared to what we can do with other Latin American countries. Canada's primary export there is western grain, which we have no trouble finding takers for because of the food crisis. Exporters in Quebec and Canada will benefit only marginally from this agreement.

We can see how some Canadian companies might find this tempting, but we do not see how the people of Quebec will benefit. That is the crux of the debate. The government wants to sign this free trade agreement not because of trade but, as I said earlier, because of investments. This agreement contains a chapter on investment protection, making it easier for Canadian companies to invest in Colombia.

Government Orders

The moment any legislation—such as environmental protection legislation—cuts into a foreign investor's profits, the government will open itself up to staggering lawsuits. But over the years, Ottawa has signed a number of bilateral agreements modelled on chapter 11 of NAFTA. There was so much criticism that the Liberals—who were in power at the time—stopped signing such agreements. I find it very strange that the Liberals, who realized back in the 1990s that it was a bad idea to sign agreements like the one the Conservative government has just introduced, are once again flip-flopping.

I have to say that we are getting used to the Liberals' 180s. Under the Conservatives, Ottawa is now on the offence and is negotiating all kinds of agreements like this one. In this case, the Conservative government is handing responsibility for deciding what is in the best interest of the people over to multinationals. Things are getting very dangerous.

The Bloc Québécois opposes the bill to implement the free trade agreement with Colombia because it contains clauses based on chapter 11 of NAFTA. Our party is asking the government to revert to the old treaty formula, which did not give multinationals control at the expense of the common good.

As I was saying earlier, free trade agreements are generally signed with countries that have similar economies. The reason is quite simple: investment protection measures can hold back development in a poor country because they give corporations the power to take a government to court if it adopts legislation or regulations that would diminish the returns of their investors. It is quickly apparent from the socio-economic data that Canada and Colombia are very different. For instance, in 2007, 47% of the Colombian population lived below the poverty line and 12% lived in abject poverty. According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, poverty is most prevalent in rural areas. In 2006, poverty affected 68% of rural areas, which is completely different than the biased data provided by the Conservatives in order to pass this bill. The latter came from the Colombian government and not from data based on facts, such as the UN data.

• (1600)

I am told that I have one minute remaining. Therefore I will move along fairly quickly.

I would like to provide a few figures. The Conservatives said that Colombia has made great progress in social terms. Since 1986, 2,690 unionists have been killed, 39 were murdered in 2007 and these murders have increased by 18% in 2008 to 46%.

This means it is time to come to our senses and to vote against this bill.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his excellent speech on the situation in Colombia. I have a question for him.

Look at the situation now in Colombia. My colleague mentioned the number of union members who have been assassinated over the last few years and the number of people who have been displaced by mining and agri-food companies. It is about 250,000 people.

We hear the Conservatives say that a free trade agreement will improve the lot of the disadvantaged and will stimulate business. People will work more and their situation will improve.

I do not agree because this all depends, of course, on the will of the government in power. If the government does not support disadvantaged people and populations and assassinates those who are union members, I am not so sure a trade agreement will do them a lot of good.

I would like to know what my colleague from Repentigny has to say about this.

Mr. Nicolas Dufour: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé very much for his extraordinarily good question and on his fantastic knowledge of these matters. I must say it gives rise to some very good exchanges in caucus.

My colleague was talking about the problematic view that if we deprive ourselves of the carrot and the stick, we will prevent Colombia from developing. If mining companies, for example, settle in Colombia, they will continue doing the deeply distressing work they do. We are not against the exploitation of natural resources, but there is a need for a minimum amount of good behaviour and respect for the environment.

I want to provide the House with a few figures the Conservatives probably do not have because they always base themselves on data that are totally false. They have not even read the committee's report, as my colleague said. I asked the Conservatives about this yesterday, but got no answer. The U.S. State Department says another 305,000 people were displaced in 2007. In 2008, more than 380,000 people had to flee their homes or places of work because of the violence. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, there will be a 25% increase in 2008 in the number of people displaced.

I fail to see how the free trade agreement presented to us here could do much to help local populations facing all the injustices they face.

• (1605)

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on an excellent speech and on injecting some humanity and intelligence into this debate.

I was a trade unionist myself, prior to being elected to the House of Commons in October. I worked for a trade union for 16 years.

Were I to be in Colombia, I might not be standing here today. This is not just numbers on a page. Two thousand six hundred and ninety trade unionists have been murdered by the Colombian regime since 1986. Twenty-seven trade unionists were murdered this year.

Government Orders

I come from Vancouver where 29 people were killed in gangland killings this year. If we had 27 trade unionists killed in this country in the last nine months, I wonder if the government would crack down as it has cracked down on crime. It is tough on crime, but it is not tough on Colombian crime when there are 27 people who were murdered because they had the audacity to stand up for rights for their fellow brothers and sisters in the trade union movement. We do not sign trade deals with people like that. The government, if it applied the same logic, would be signing trade deals with the gangs in Vancouver.

I would like to know from my hon. colleague what he has to say about the government's approach to crime and to trade union rights in Colombia.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Repentigny has only one minute.

Mr. Nicolas Dufour: Mr. Speaker, I will be brief.

I want to congratulate my colleague on the question he asked me. It was extremely brilliant. I can tell it comes from the bottom of his heart.

What we honestly see here is the demagoguery the Conservatives resort to all day long. First they tell us they are tough on crime, they are going to set things straight, and they act tough, and then they have no problem doing business with the Government of Colombia at a time when 30 members of the Colombian Parliament are under arrest and most of them are close to the Uribe family.

I think that is really ironic. We have a government that says it is tough on crime and claims to solve problems but the first thing it does is sign agreements indiscriminately.

[*English*]

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the House to talk about the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement.

I would like to start by congratulating the hon. Minister of International Trade and all of his officials for their hard work in securing this agreement. In these tough economic times we need to be doing everything that we can to open doors for Canadians, to create new commercial opportunities around the world and to work with our partners to help our citizens succeed.

As in other Latin American countries, Colombia needs the support of Canada to overcome its challenges and to ensure continued economic development. We would not want to turn our backs on the government of Colombia and send a negative message, not only to Colombians but to all those in the Americas who look forward to increased trade bringing prosperity and improved governance to the region.

The Canada-Colombia free trade agreement is an important part of this commitment to the Americas and a demonstration of this government's commitment to help all Canadians move through these tough economic times.

As previous speakers have indicated, this agreement is about more than trade and investment. It includes parallel agreements on labour

co-operation and the environment as well. We have a strong and comprehensive labour co-operation agreement that will help improve labour standards for Colombian workers in many different sectors.

I know that some hon. members have raised concerns about the potential impact of free trade agreements on workers. It is an important concern for this government as well.

I want to assure members that this government firmly believes that prosperity cannot come at the expense of workers' rights. This government is committed to working with Colombia to improve labour standards and to help Colombia protect its workers. That is why the Canada-Colombia labour co-operation agreement, or LCA, is so very important. This labour co-operation agreement goes beyond what was negotiated on labour in the context of previous agreements and serves as a reference point for future labour agreements to be negotiated between Canada and the developing countries.

In this light, this agreement commits both countries to ensuring that their laws respect the International Labour Organization's 1998 declaration on fundamental principles and rights at work. As we know, the ILO declaration covers a wide range of workers' rights and obligations: the 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.

However, our agreement with Colombia goes even further. It commits both countries to provide acceptable protections for occupational health and safety, for migrant workers will now enjoy the same legal protections as nationals in terms of working conditions, and for minimum employment standards covering such things as minimum wages and hours of work.

As we can appreciate, these commitments are only as strong as the dispute resolution mechanisms and penalties backing them up. That is why I am pleased to see that the agreement includes appropriate penalties for not living up to these commitments.

To ensure the highest possible compliance, the agreement provides for an open, transparent and streamlined complaints and dispute resolution process. As part of this, members of the public can submit complaints to either government concerning non-compliance of a party with its labour laws and the provisions under the ILO declaration.

If the matter cannot be resolved, an independent panel review process kicks in, which may require the offending country to pay up to \$15 million annually into a co-operation fund to be used to resolve the matter identified through the dispute resolution process.

It is absolutely false to state that murder of a trade unionist will be penalized by a fine. Nowhere in the FTA or LCA does it state, directly or indirectly, that the murder of a trade unionist will result in a fine. Murders of any kind are a judicial matter and will continue to be fully prosecuted under Colombian laws.

Government Orders

The Colombian government has demonstrated resolve in recent years to fight impunity for such crimes. The murder of one union leader is one too many. The government of Colombia has committed significant financial resources for the investigation and prosecution of violent acts against union leaders and members through a special unit of the Office of the Attorney General.

In addition, through the protection program for vulnerable groups, the government of Colombia is providing protection for labour union members, their families and other potentially targeted groups, such as politicians, journalists and civil leaders. These are clear examples of the Colombian government's resolve.

● (1610)

Canadian citizens expect that the Government of Canada will remain committed to preventing those murders and other forms of intimidation and will prosecute those who are responsible.

I would like to reiterate that the fines payable under the labour agreement are not designed to punish specific criminal acts. They are designed to help ensure compliance with and respect for domestic and international labour obligations.

Moneys placed in the co-operation fund would be disbursed according to an agreed upon action plan, which means Canada would have considerable leverage in ensuring that the matters under dispute are effectively resolved.

Through the Canada-Colombia LCA, Canadians would have a unique tool at their disposal to ensure that the Colombian government continues to demonstrate the political will and provide the necessary resources to improve the labour situation.

At the same time, we clearly recognize the challenges that a nation like Colombia faces in complying with every standard that is set out in this agreement. Nevertheless, Canada believes that the compliance with the obligations of this agreement can be achieved, not only through a robust dispute resolution mechanism but also through enhanced technical co-operation.

That is why our agreement would be complemented with a \$1 million labour-related technical co-operation program and has started to implement projects in Colombia to promote and enforce internationally recognized labour standards, particularly in the areas of labour inspection, tripartite consultation, enforcement of labour rights and occupational safety and health. This is a program that would help Colombia enforce its domestic laws and meet the very highest standards established by this agreement. It is a program that would foster greater dialogue and co-operation between workers, employers and governments to address labour issues. Despite the fact that these groups' relations have been marked by polarization in Colombia, improved collaboration between these social actors is facilitating a culture of enhanced social dialogue and better governments.

Canada is committed to helping our Colombian partners make the most out of our new free trade agreement.

As we are aware, this government is re-engaging with our partners in the Americas and also promoting the principles of sound governance, security and prosperity. We see improving working rights in the Americas as a fundamental part of this pursuit.

More broadly, we are committed to playing an active role in promoting human rights across Latin America and throughout the Caribbean, and that includes Colombia.

Since 1972, Canada's development assistance program has invested \$355 million toward helping Colombia and focuses on human rights, specifically the rights of children, youth and displaced persons.

Over the last two years alone, we have provided \$32 million in development assistance to Colombia.

We are one of the largest supporters of the Organization of American States' work in Colombia to support peace and demobilize paramilitary forces in that country. Our global peace and security fund is helping to promote peace, protect victims' rights and help strengthen Colombia's judicial system. Our embassy in Colombia has also been very active on many fronts to support efforts in that country. Canada enjoys a frank and open dialogue with Colombia's government at the most senior levels.

All this to say that Canada takes human rights in Colombia very seriously and this commitment extends to workers' rights. We believe that free trade can play a positive role in the country's economic and social life, and workers' rights fit squarely into this principle.

We will continue to guide our engagement with our Colombia and our partners throughout the hemisphere.

During these tough economic times, this government is committed to helping Canadians complete and succeed in the global economy and we are doing so through an aggressive and principled approach to free trade, an approach that includes a strong focus on workers' rights.

I would like to reiterate that Canada does not and will not ignore the difficult labour and human rights situation in Colombia. Nevertheless, we believe that engagement with a government committed to improving the situation is the right course of action. Canada will continue to monitor developments and progress in the labour area in Colombia.

Canada believes that economic development and the enforcement of labour rights will strengthen the social foundations of Colombia. It will reduce violence and bring greater prosperity for all of its citizens.

For those reasons, I ask all hon. members for their support of this agreement and of the many efforts to help Canada thrive in the global economy.

● (1615)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with a bit of surprise and great interest to my hon. colleague's talk about how to bring dialogue among the various labour and capital that exists.

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I was actually pleased to hear the member say that one death of a trade unionist was too much. I would like to ask him about Tique Adolfo who was killed on January 1 in the municipality of Prado (Tolima). That murder took place while our government was having its frank discussions with Colombia. What steps were taken to ensure that murder would be the only murder?

On January 7, Ricardo Rasedo Guerra Diego was murdered in Colombia. On January 16, Arled Samboni Guaca was murdered in Colombia by paramilitaries. Leovigildo Mejia was murdered on January 28. I could go on and on. Every week of this year, while our government was having its frank discussions, people have been taken out of their homes in Colombia and shot.

What concrete steps has the member or his government taken to investigate these murders and to bring the perpetrators from those paramilitary death squads to justice.

• (1620)

Mr. Gordon Brown: Mr. Speaker, as I said, one murder of a trade unionist or of any person is one too many, but Canada has been helping in this regard. We have been taking action and there have been positive developments in Colombia.

Between 2002 and 2008, kidnappings decreased by 87%. Homicide rates have dropped by 44%. It is not perfect but this agreement is a step in the right direction. It would give Canadians some leverage and some ability to have a say in what is going on there. We have been taking positive actions.

This agreement, as I laid out in my presentation, would bring a lot of positive developments to relations between Canada and Colombia. It is a positive step forward and it would continue to allow Canadians to engage with Colombia in a positive fashion.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Leeds—Grenville for giving an excellent speech on this issue and explaining to us in more detail the free trade agreement between Colombia and Canada.

I do know that in 2008 there was \$704 million worth of exports from Canada to Colombia. Therefore, it obviously is not a new thing for Canada and Colombia to do business with each other. We have had free trade agreements with the United States for some time. We just recently entered into free trade agreements with some of the smaller European countries and we are currently negotiating a free trade agreement with the European Union.

Could the hon. member tell us how he feels free trade agreements help us to expand our worldwide markets?

Mr. Gordon Brown: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, in these challenging economic times, it is important that we reach out around the world and create new markets. Our government really is pursuing an aggressive trade agenda with the Americas, Europe, India, the Middle East and China.

This gives me an opportunity to talk about something that happened right in my riding of Leeds—Grenville just this past weekend. The Canadian Thousand Islands and the 1000 Islands in China have signed an agreement of co-operation and friendship. Some folks came over from China. The Chinese ambassador was there. Our Minister of the Environment, who is also responsible for

Parks Canada, was there. This is another example of reaching out around the world.

This government has been very proactive in working around the world and pushing Canada out there, which will not only help us in terms of our relations around the world but will help Canadians and help create jobs, which is what we all know we need, especially in these challenging economic times.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, given that this is my first occasion to stand in the House on the resumption of our duties here, I want to say how personally pleased I am to be back with all my colleagues in all the parties, notwithstanding the clear challenges we face in this particular session.

There has been much debate in the House but also outside on the subject of the pros and cons of freer trade between Canada and Colombia. There has been much concern about human rights and I want to commend all the parties for expressing those legitimate concerns. I firmly believe that everyone in the House is very concerned about the protection of human rights, the protection of workers' rights, the protection of labour standards. I believe that every member of the House believes very strongly in those issues, and certainly no one here condones the deterioration of human rights. No one encourages any kind of deterioration of human rights. On the contrary, everyone in the House and Canadians as a whole want to encourage improvement in human rights, labour standards and workers' rights around the world, and that includes Colombia.

However, the big question is, how do we do that? In this context where we are talking about encouraging freer trade with Colombia, this is not just a question of economics. I personally, and certainly the Liberal Party, believe very strongly in free trade, both in principle but also in action. Again, it is not purely from an economic perspective that we take that position. I believe very strongly in constructive engagement, and this is an opportunity for Canada and Canadians to help Colombia and Colombians in improving their situation, not only from an economic perspective but also from a human rights perspective, an education perspective and generally a lifting of the conditions in Colombia for Colombians.

Those who suffer behind walls do not benefit from the building of those walls any higher. Those who suffer behind walls benefit from the tearing down of those walls. I as a Liberal and a Canadian feel very strongly that the more we engage with countries like Colombia, the more we engage not just on an economic basis but using those economic and commercial relations to engage more fully in terms of educational transfers, cultural engagement and dialogue, that increased economic and commercial transactions, increased economic activity between Canadians and Colombians will ensure an opportunity for that much more dialogue about the challenges being faced.

We also see the international community nearly unanimous in saying that what is happening in Colombia is moving in the right direction. I do not think there is a country in this world that can say their human rights record is perfect. Canadians every once in a while need very strongly to look in our own mirror and recognize that we are not perfect either.

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So there is not a country in this world that is perfect in terms of its human rights record, but the opportunity for Canadians to engage in dialogue through commercial transactions, through increased economic activity and on all the levels that would accompany that, provides us with the opportunity to help Colombians in achieving improvements in their own situation in their country.

Canada alone will not change Colombia, but Canadians and Colombians working more closely together have an opportunity to achieve significant improvement. If we look at increased economic activity, more investment by Canadians in Colombia will provide opportunities for more Canadians to work in Colombia. That provides opportunity for more Colombians to work with Canadians and to engage in more dialogue and to see what we do in this country. We have an opportunity to show where there could be improvements, what we have been able to do to achieve significant high standards in this country. That provides an opportunity for Colombians to see what Canadians have been able to accomplish.

I will repeat, Canada will not change Colombia; Colombians will. The Colombians will be in a much better position to do the improvements they need to achieve in their country with the support of countries like Canada and Canadians.

●(1625)

I will go back to the fact that every party and member in the House has expressed concerns. I will repeat that I believe all parties need to be commended for their concern. The debate is, how do we help Colombia achieve improvements? It is not just an economic question, it is a question of an opportunity to help that country move forward.

We have heard lots of statistics of all sorts of challenges in Colombia. I will go back to the fact that, for virtually every country in this world, we can point to statistics and examples of things that have been quite devastating. The fact that there have been challenges in Colombia does not mean, by any means, that we as Canadians should turn our backs and help build higher walls. Those very challenges suggest that we take this opportunity to help and improve.

As I said, many in the international community have seen President Uribe and certain members of his government make really strong efforts for improvement. My hon. colleague from Leeds—Grenville has pointed out significant statistics in terms of some of the improvements.

These are opportunities we have to say to the people of Colombia that they are on the right track and we recognize that they are on the right track. We recognize that it is not perfect, but by greater economic engagement, greater commercial transactions, and greater involvement and engagement by Canadians with Colombians, and Colombians with Canadians, we can build on commercial transactions for greater engagement on an educational level and a cultural level, and simply on the basis of much greater dialogue. That will give us the opportunity.

As I said, Canada will not change Colombia, Colombians will, but Colombians will be in a much better position to do so with the help of Canada and Canadians.

●(1630)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest and appreciated the comments by the hon. member. She said the reason we should support this agreement is because it will further dialogue.

I am waiting to hear from Liberal representatives and Conservative members who agreed to the North American agreement, which included the side agreements on the environment and provided for an independent forum, a council headed by the environment ministers of the countries, a secretariat that provided for an independent entity that will actually work with them and provide that genuine opportunity for dialogue on environmental matters that relate to human rights in that country.

How can she defend this extremely watered-down agreement? How is it that we are treating Colombians in a different way than Americans and Mexicans?

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Mr. Speaker, for me, it is a much larger question than a specific agreement, a specific signed document. It is a greater element of my personal belief, and I believe I can speak for the Liberal Party in this, our overall belief, that greater engagement itself will inspire and encourage greater dialogue.

It is not so much a question of regulating specific requirements. We can put into any agreement we want all sorts of specific requirements, milestones and things that we need to see met, but we all know what happens with international agreements in those areas. We all know and my hon. colleague has highlighted the fact that in some cases those do not necessarily achieve the specific goals they were intended to achieve.

I am pragmatic in that sense. I recognize that those are some of the challenges. My position, however, is that it is the larger aspect of greater engagement and involvement. When business people engage in transactions, they meet, they talk, they see each other in action and in their respective cultures and environments, and they see how they can do better.

It is not perfect, but I firmly believe there is an opportunity for constructive engagement that in fact can help the people of Colombia economically, culturally, educationally and environmentally, and we need to take that opportunity.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague across the way for some very sensible words on this free trade agreement. This is something that this government obviously supports. I would also like, at this time, to wish her an early happy birthday, as I understand that is coming up.

I have had the privilege in the last couple of days of sitting in on the Inter-parliamentary Forum of the Americas conference hosted here by Canada. The Canada-Colombia free trade agreement came up in the discussions by a number of countries. It was even suggested that this agreement with Colombia could be expanded to include all of South America. That is probably a stretch in reality, but it gives us an idea of the kind of feeling there is in support of these kinds of agreements.

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My question for the member would be whether she thinks this kind of agreement with Colombia and other countries could actually open up a gateway there and expand into other countries down the road, and would that be beneficial?

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his kind words about the debate, but I will volunteer that the birthday in question has already occurred recently. Given that it is a rather significant one, I plan on celebrating it all year. Therefore, I want to thank my colleague very much for his good wishes.

The short answer to that question is, yes, absolutely. As I said in my original comments, we not only believe in free trade in principle, but we believe in free trade in action, for all the reasons I stated. That applies all around the world, not just to Colombia.

There are clear economic benefits to free trade, but there are also, in my view, very clear benefits to the greater level of engagement on all levels that come with that exposure to greater engagement from a commercial perspective.

I firmly hope that we will be able to build on this free trade agreement and encourage the establishment of more.

• (1635)

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to rise in the House today to talk about the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement. It is a very important agreement for Canada, especially today in these tough economic times. We need to be doing everything we can to open doors for Canadians, Canadian producers, Canadian manufacturers to create new commercial opportunities around the world and to work with our partners to help our citizens succeed.

Free trade agreements are a critical part of these efforts. We must seek out more trade and investment opportunities for our businesses. Our government is committed to this pursuit. In our global commerce strategy, we are moving forward on our aggressive trade agenda, one that includes pursuing bilateral and multilateral trade relationships that will work for Canadians.

Canada's own history is a textbook case of the benefits of reaching out to our partners for trade and investment opportunities. We are a trading nation. Our businesses can compete with the best in the world. Today, I am proud to say that we can find Canadian businesses, Canadian products and Canadian investment dollars at work all over the world. However, it is a competitive world out there. Our businesses need market access in order to compete, now, more than ever, as our business community faces the greatest economic challenge in generations. That is why the free trade agreement we signed last fall was such an important accomplishment.

Canadian businesses and investors have long called for a closer economic partnership with Colombia. They certainly see the clear progress Colombia has made in recent years to tackle such difficult challenges as terrorism, poverty, insecurity and crime, but they also recognize the immense economic potential. Colombia is a vibrant and dynamic market for Canadian exports, a market of 48 million people.

I have had the privilege of travelling to Colombia twice, once with the international trade committee, and I was very pleasantly

surprised. I suppose it is one of those things that when we go to a country like Colombia, we do not know what to expect, and I was pleasantly surprised as far as their infrastructure went, but there is still room for improvements. This deal will go a long way to helping them as well.

I talked about this market of 48 million people. At the same time, it is a very appealing market for foreign investors. Colombia's government is committed to reversing years of underinvestment in the public infrastructure as I mentioned. Countries like ours, which have so much expertise in this area, can offer a lot. The potential goes far beyond infrastructure and includes other key sectors like agriculture and industrial goods, and services like engineering, mining, energy and financial services. These are all areas where Canada excels.

Moreover, these sectors are linchpins of our economy in communities large and small all across the country. Once this free trade agreement is in place, Canadian exporters and investors in a broad range of sectors will benefit from lower trade and investment barriers in the Colombian market, which will increase their export potential and help them expand their reach into this exciting market. It will also put them on a level playing field with competitors like the United States and the European Union, which are also seeking preferential access to the Colombian marketplace.

Colombia is moving forward on an ambitious economic agenda that includes free trade agreements with a wide range of partners. We cannot put our exporters at a relative disadvantage. The time for Canada to act is now.

Thankfully, we are starting from a position of strength. We have to remember that Canada and Colombia already enjoy a significant trade relationship. In 2008 our two-way trade in merchandise totalled \$1.35 billion. Canadian exports that year saw a 28.9% increase over the previous year to reach \$704 million. Key Canadian products like paper, wheat, barley, pulse crops and trucks were driving forces behind this success.

Once the new agreement is in place, trade in these products, along with other products like beef, pork, machinery and mining equipment, will now be easier and more profitable for Canadian companies and producers. Indeed, agriculture was a key driver for these free trade agreement negotiations. From the very start, we were guided by the principle that a successful outcome on agriculture was absolutely critical. In numeric terms, our agricultural exports to Colombia face tariffs of anywhere from 17% to as high as 80%. Once this free trade agreement is in place, 86% of all those agricultural tariffs will be eliminated.

• (1640)

Being a farmer myself and representing a very rural riding that is a very large producer of agriculture products of all kinds, this is great news particularly for my pork and beef producers. That translates into about \$25 million in annual duty savings for our producers here in Canada. That is a lot of coin. Clearly, this is a significant benefit for our agriculture sector, one that will sharpen producers' competitive edge during this difficult economic time.

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However, as we move forward on creating new commercial opportunities, we must also recognize the very positive role that increased trade and investment can play in a nation like Colombia. The free trade agreement benefits Canada, but it benefits our Colombian partners too by giving them access to the North American marketplace, a greater choice of products from Canada and a chance to promote economic development in their own country. That is very important.

As Canada's own history proves, the single best way to create opportunities for citizens is to harness the skills, ingenuity and products of the people and carry those advantages to the marketplaces of the world. That is exactly what this free trade agreement would do. Free trade is a vehicle to help us do exactly that. Colombia is a nation that is making substantial progress toward becoming a more stable and secure nation. It is not there yet, but it is heading in the right direction, and this deal and Canada will help it along that road.

This government certainly wants to support that effort and give entrepreneurship a chance to take root and flourish in communities across the country. This fits squarely into the Government of Colombia's efforts to promote a more prosperous, equitable and secure nation, and it also fits with Canada's own objectives in the Americas, namely to promote democracy, prosperity and security throughout the hemisphere.

We all want a democratic and secure hemisphere, one that is free from the shackles of terrorism, crime and instability. However, we cannot have a democratic and secure nation without creating a path for our citizens' aspirations or without creating jobs and opportunities through the power of international trade and investment. That is just what the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement would do.

It is significant that as we signed the free trade agreement, we also signed parallel agreements on labour cooperation and the environment. These agreements commit both nations to work together to ensure high levels of protection for workers and the environment. Canada believes that trade and investment liberalization can and must go hand in hand with labour rights and the environment. These agreements with our Colombian partners prove it.

During these uncertain economic times, our government's commitment to partnerships and to opening doors for Canadian businesses and investors around the world remains strong. We are committed to moving forward on more free trade negotiations with other partners around the world, from Asia to the Americas, to ensure that Canadians have the opportunities they need not only to weather today's economic storm but also to emerge on the other side of it, stronger and more competitive than ever before.

For this reason and for the many benefits to our Colombian partners that this agreement brings, I ask all hon. members in the House to support this Canada-Colombia free trade agreement.

The Deputy Speaker: Before moving on to questions and comments, 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 Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Broadcasting and Telecommunications; the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, Arts and Culture.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I noted that in the member's speech, he made several references to his Colombian partners and he did reference that there has been substantial progress made to the stability of the country. I would like to draw his attention to the fact that this year alone, 27 trade unionists have been murdered in Colombia.

In fact, in the last 34 days, there have been an additional five trade unionists murdered: On August 11, Diego Cobo was murdered; on August 16, Jairo Martínez Solarte; on August 21, Gustavo Gómez; on August 22, Fredy Díaz Ortiz, and on August 23, Mauricio Antonio Monsalve Vásquez.

I would like to ask the member whether he thinks that this is adequate progress on stabilization of this country. Being from a party and government that believe in law and order and punishing criminals, does he not think it is time to take a second look at this agreement, pull back a little bit and maybe look to see whether we in fact should be furthering the negotiations until there really is some stability in the country?

• (1645)

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, with respect to my colleague's comments about the number of people murdered in Colombia, I do not know of any country where a murder does not happen from time to time. As my colleague from Leeds—Grenville mentioned earlier, one is always too many.

Colombia is obviously working on some of its problems and improving yearly. There are facts to back this up, although I do not have them in front of me. I am sure the member is quite aware of them as well. Alienating the country by avoiding it until the murder rate is at zero is not the way to go either.

We need to help Colombia along, and this deal will certainly do that. We would class ourselves as a well-to-do country, and we have an obligation to help others around the world who need help. This deal will do that. I am certainly proud to support it, and I hope that my colleague sees the light at the end of the tunnel and decides to do the same thing.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am a bit shocked by my hon. colleague's response, and I would like to follow it up with him.

He says he does not know of any country where a murder does not happen. Murder certainly happens. People fall off buses and they fall off cliffs. However, we are talking about a very specific kind of murder that has been happening while the Conservative government has been promoting this deal.

For example, Eduar Carbonell Peña, who was a teacher, was kidnapped from his workplace and murdered on September 10, just a few days ago, for helping to organize a union. Does my colleague know of other countries where teachers are taken out and murdered? Maybe, but I am not aware of any.

On August 23, Mauricio Antonio Monsalve Vásquez, a union member, was disappeared from his workplace.

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On August 22, Fredy Diaz Ortiz, another union member, was taken out and shot by gunmen.

Would the member tell me of other countries where two to three union members a week are taken out of their workplaces and shot? Would he tell me of any concrete steps his government has taken to raise these issues? Is he worried about alienating the junta that has taken these people out of their workplaces and shot them? Is that his biggest concern?

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, it has to be noted right off the bat that the NDP has never supported a free trade agreement of any kind and probably never will.

I have some facts here about some of the problems, the kidnappings and murders. Between 2002 and 2008, kidnappings in Colombia decreased by 87%. Homicide rates have dropped by 44%. Moderate poverty has fallen from 55% to 45%. Colombia has attained coverage of 94% in basic education and 31% in higher education.

To get to the point, Colombia is far from perfect, but Canada is not perfect either. Colombia is heading in the right direction. This kind of anti-Colombia sentiment is not good for Colombia, and it certainly is not good for Canadian producers.

The member should get on track, support this, and let that country keep improving the rates—

• (1650)

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate. The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured to rise in this House once again to speak to this issue.

We could have a philosophical debate. Our friends in the Liberal Party and Conservative Party use the mantra of free trade, fundamentally they say that as long as capital flows the world will be a better place, and as long as capital flows and there is no obligation of capital to have any regional, local, national obligations, that is okay. It is an ideological view. It is part of the whole theory of the magic wand, that if all the capital and wealth goes to very few people they will sprinkle pixie dust and all will suddenly become better.

As my colleague from Willowdale said, it is not about regulating anything, it is about encouraging them. This is the world view they have. It is a philosophical view. To me this invisible hand that the Conservatives believe in is the invisible hand that is in taxpayers' pockets taking money from the working people and giving it to people who have so much.

It is very much like G. K. Chesterton, if we look at this blind belief in capital without obligation. G. K. Chesterton said it is all about the horrible mysticism of money. If we look through this veil of mysticism to get to the facts, this issue on Colombia free trade becomes very disturbing.

I come from one of the largest mining regions in the world. Mining is international in scope. Many of my constituents have travelled the world on mining exploration crews and drilling crews. I

know so many investors who work internationally because mining is international in nature.

One of the things we have come to realize is that it is not the issue of capital itself that should be the prime focus of the economy but how capital helps build a resource and helps build a regional economy. To do that certain rules must be in place.

Nobody ever encouraged the mine owners in my region to lower the silicosis deaths. Those immigrant men died by the thousands. Their wives were told that they should not even ask for compensation because they were an embarrassment to Canada for having had the nerve to come here and work in the mines, while their husbands died in their 30s and 40s. The only thing that changed the mining rules in Canada was people saying there had to be some rules and regulations. So that is what we are discussing.

What I have heard today from colleagues in the Liberal Party and Conservative Party is that we need to encourage the Colombians, that Canada cannot change Colombia, only Colombians can change Colombia, and that if we all somehow just allow capital to do its thing then the Colombians will all get better because they will have access to our McCain's french fries and we will have access to their massive copper deposits.

We have to put this in the context of reality. This is the crux of the problem today. We are dealing with a murderous regime. We have raised issues of people who have been murdered in the last week in Colombia, while the government has been flaunting this agreement. We have been told by the Conservative member and by the member for Willowdale, as well, backed up in the Liberal Party, "Hey, nobody is perfect. We all make mistakes." Well, I yelled at my kids last week, but that is not the same as someone being dragged out of their workplace and shot for organizing a union just one week ago.

I think it is incumbent upon us in this House to ask what steps will we take to ensure that when capital is allowed to flow between Colombia and Canada and vice versa that certain obligations will have to be met.

My colleagues in the Liberal Party called the human rights record in Colombia "a challenge". We are talking about thousands and thousands of people who have been murdered. These are not drunken murders on a Saturday night or drive-by killings. Some of my colleagues in the Conservative Party have said, "Hey, we have murders in Canada". Certainly, we had murders after the Garden of Eden, Cain killed Abel. That is a different fact than the systemic and systematic targeting of people who are trying to organize their workplaces and who are being taken out and shot, murdered in front of their families. This year alone 27 people were murdered, all of them tied into the fact that they were working in unsafe working conditions and were trying to speak up.

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•(1655)

My colleague from Leeds—Grenville, who I have a great amount of respect for, said one murder is too much. I certainly agree. It would be a lot easier for me and my colleagues to support an agreement with Colombia if we heard, after the first murder this year which happened on January 1, our government stand and say that one murder is too much. Our government should ask what steps will Colombia take to stop those murders. But we have not heard that from the Conservative government. We have heard there are great opportunities for our producers, and as long as we keep selling to them, somehow they will stop murdering.

My colleague from Willowdale said Canada cannot change Colombia, only Colombia can change Colombia. That is an absolutely disgraceful, pitiful response. The only thing that changed apartheid in South Africa was an international response that fought back. The Afrikaners did not change apartheid, it was the international community who said, contrary to the position of the Liberal Party today, that we should not regulate these things, that we should encourage them. Nobody is perfect was the line I heard from the Liberal Party.

Last year murders went up 18% in Colombia. Things were not getting better under the Conservative Party's negotiations. They continue to deteriorate because there is a murderous regime targeting people who are trying to improve their conditions. That is what this is about.

Many people in my riding will be more than happy to move, work in Colombia, Peru and many other countries because of their mining expertise, but I also know the extreme unwillingness of people to go into regions where they do not have the basic rule of law. That is what we are talking about. I would like to put this in context.

My colleague in the Conservative Party said we had to have a hemisphere free of terrorism. If we look at the history of terrorism in North America and the Americas, it is almost entirely based on the state terror that existed in countries like El Salvador and Guatemala where there were murderous regimes and death squads. I hear my colleagues in the House say that there are certainly challenges and many places where people are not nice to each other. They said the same thing when they took the Maryknoll nuns from the United States and had them raped and murdered. They said the same thing when they killed all the Jesuit priests in El Salvador. They said there are problems on all sides but we knew then that it was false. The problems were the result of the regime and the problems today are from a regime that is targeting, the same as in El Salvador, human rights activists.

I would like to pose the question that I posed earlier to the Conservative Party. Tique Adolfo was murdered on January 1 this year for trying to organize a union. That is the one that was too many for this year. What steps did the Conservative government take at any time to raise that as an issue? It should have raised this issue and said that to have a legitimate free trade agreement Colombia would have to do better. But no, on January 7, 16, 28, February 12, 15, and three times on March 24, all union members were killed by paramilitaries. The killings have gone on and on.

The Canadian government is telling us today that we are setting an example for the world by accepting the fact that these murders go on, but we are going to get access to Colombia's copper, oil and we are going to sell it farm machinery. There are four million displaced people in Colombia. There have been 3,000 people murdered. We are not talking about a country that has been at war, we are talking about a regime that has been at war with its people.

What steps will Parliament take to say that if there is going to be a trade agreement with Colombia, there are going to be strong principles, not side agreements, not platitudes about one being too many? When are the Conservatives going to speak out and publicly say to the Colombian government that we want to see action because we have not heard that in the House? We look to the United States where Congress is pushing back on the Colombia free trade agreements there as well because the Americans recognize there is no benefit of giving legitimacy to a regime like this until there are concrete steps being made to protect people whose only crime is speaking up for safe workplaces with proper wages.

•(1700)

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening with interest and some disbelief to the pathological words coming from the NDP members today who, in their description of Colombia and of the Uribe government, completely ignore the reality of what is happening in Colombia. The fact is that the murders, the attacks he describes, have been a product of the narco-economy, the FARC guerrillas fueled by drug money, the drug gangsters fueled by drug money, and the civil war fueled by drug money.

How on earth does providing legitimate economic opportunities and jobs in the real economy through legitimate trade, and helping the Colombian people wean themselves away from the narco-economy, in any way, shape or form risk human rights, labour rights and the environment?

We already have a commercial relationship with Colombia, yet it does not have a robust, rules-based structure around labour and the environment. This particular trade agreement has the most robust labour and environmental agreements of any trade agreement Canada has ever signed.

How does introducing a rules-based structure around labour rights make things worse? Why does the hon. member not just stand up and admit that the NDP is against every free trade agreement and sit back down?

Instead of that, the New Democrats are trying to hoist it so that it cannot go to committee. Are they afraid that at committee the truth will come out and people will actually learn that there are some strong advantages to free and open trade in a rules-based structure with countries like Colombia, as we help—

The Deputy Speaker: I will have to stop the hon. member there to give the member for Timmins—James Bay a chance to respond.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague coming mightily to the defence of the Conservative Party, as he has done so many times in the past.

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Six days ago in Colombia, Eduar Carbonell Pena was murdered. He was not murdered by drug gangs. He was not murdered in an SUV drive-by. He was a teacher organizing a union. That is why he was killed.

The member is trying to foist onto the Canadian people that narco-gangs are interested in teachers who are organizing unions. That is a pitiful piece of fiction because a few days before another union organizer was murdered on August 22. Are the narcos after that workplace too? On August 21, Gustavo Gomez and Fredy Diaz were murdered. I am looking at names of people not murdered in drug cartel deals. I am looking at teachers. I am looking at people working in mines.

If the member wants to come here and cover up the fact that he and the Conservatives are signing agreements with absolutely no respect at all for the fundamental rights of workers to organize, that is a position he can take. As I said earlier, it is certainly a world view that certain people have, but he should at least admit that people are being murdered, as they were last week, and why.

I also wonder why it is that nobody from the Liberals or Conservatives has spoken out once when one of these union members was being taken out and murdered. We are being told that nobody is perfect. Now we are being told it is the narcos doing it. They have never spoken out and union members are being murdered.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals and Conservatives have criticized the NDP, saying that we are against any free trade deal. The questions we are raising are these. What about this deal? What about the commitments, supposedly by the Liberals and the Conservatives, to the rights of workers and the environment being part of economic development? I do not see that in this agreement.

• (1705)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, trade is so important for Canadians, but legitimizing countries that are murdering union activists and teachers is not the business this Parliament should be involved.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as many of my hon. colleagues have reiterated over the course of this debate, trade and investment can help a nation like Colombia move through troubled times and create new opportunities for people, opportunities for them to thrive and prosper.

Colombia has made remarkable strides and showed great resilience toward bringing about an end to this conflict. Colombia has an established democracy, a growing economy, a responsible government, an active civil society and stable institutions.

Over the last six years, the personal security situation of the vast majority of Colombians has improved. Illegal armed groups have been weakened. This progress is acknowledged by the global community and international organizations that are present in Colombia.

The government of Colombia has also taken positive steps that demonstrate its continued effort to curb violence against trade unionists, fight impunity for the perpetrators of such crimes and promote security and peace within a framework of human rights protection and the rule of law.

Nevertheless the Government of Canada recognizes that challenges remain in Colombia and is supporting efforts in Colombia to strengthen peace, security and full respect for human rights.

Colombia continues to experience the effects of over 40 years of conflict and violence and it is all too often Colombian civilians suffer the most. Clearly, for all of Colombia's progress and ongoing effort, it is vital for Canada and other countries to pursue policies of engagement and support for peace in Colombia.

Canada has taken this call for international responsibility seriously. Our Americas strategy recognizes the need to pursue three priorities, which are prosperity, security, democracy and human rights, all vital issues that intersect in a very compelling way in Colombia.

Prosperity is of course an important aspect of this engagement. As many hon. members have rightly stated, trade creates opportunity and opportunity generates prosperity. Prosperity, when pursued with full respect for the rights of all members in society, offers incentives for individuals to move out of the networks of conflict and criminality and into the legitimate formal economy.

Prosperity, in short, can make its own contribution to the improvement of stability.

However, while a commitment to expanding economic opportunities is an essential ingredient on long term stability, prosperity alone will not bring an end to complex and long standing conflicts, such as Colombia's. For this reason, Canada aims not only to promote prosperity, but also to strengthen peace building efforts and respect for human rights. Canadians can be very proud of our steadfast role in assisting our Colombian partners along with path.

My esteemed colleague spoke yesterday about the important work being done by CIDA in this complex environment. The member from St. Boniface did that again this afternoon.

I would like today to make special mention of the contribution Canada is making through the Department of Foreign Affairs Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force, which can be referred to as START, and the Global Peace and Security Fund, GPSF.

Since 2006, START has developed \$14.5 million in conflict prevention and the pursuit of justice for conflict victims in Colombia. With a program of \$5 million from the GPSF, this fiscal year alone START provides vital support for increased stability through conflict resolution activities, often in partnership with key democracy, rule of law and human rights related institutions.

Canadians can be rightfully proud of the range of work that has been carried out by START through the Global Peace and Security Fund.

For example, Canada is one of the largest donors for mine action in Colombia. From 2003 to 2008, working primarily through the Organization of American States and UNICEF, START has contributed more than \$3.7 million for humanitarian demining, stockpile destruction, victim assistance, mine risk education and mine action coordination.

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•(1710)

We are also one of the largest supporters of the Organization of American States' mission to support the peace process in Colombia. The OAS' mission is doing critical work on behalf of the international community to support peace and to monitor the demobilization process of over 30,000 former illegal paramilitary combatants in that country.

Canada's contribution goes far beyond disarming combatants and removing the destructive ordinance of war. We are also placing the rights of victims at the forefront of our peace-building efforts.

Canada was one of the first countries to step forward in support of Colombia's truth, justice and reconciliation process. We have developed new partnerships with Colombian, Canadian and other international civil society organizations to protect the rights of vulnerable groups, including women, indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombians.

This year, for example, START is supporting Lawyers Without Borders Canada to provide international accompaniment and legal assistance to threatened Colombian human rights defenders. Lawyers Without Borders' work will help Colombian indigenous communities in conflict-affected areas to receive legal representation and pursue justice for past crimes through the Colombian legal system.

START is also providing over \$1 million this fiscal year to provide legal representation for women victims of sexual violence as a result of the conflict. Canada's assistance is ensuring that hundreds of women are provided psychosocial support in dealing with crimes against them. Our work has enabled some of the first trials under Colombia's justice and peace law to seek justice for these sexual crimes.

Another new project, coordinated by the United Nations Development Program, is bringing together, for the first time, the Colombian government and the Colombian labour unions. Together, they will conduct a joint evaluation of violence against union leaders and organized union members and develop new ideas to improve the legislation for their protection.

Canada also continues to be an active member of the Group of 24, a group of countries which encourages and facilitates dialogue between the government of Colombia and international and national civil society organizations working in the country.

This year we are proud to take up the role of supporting the G24 secretariat to ensure this forum of frank discussion around conflict and human rights issues continues.

Clearly, protection and promotion of human rights and seeking a durable resolution to Colombia's conflict are at the very core of Canada's engagement in Colombia. Canada's pioneering support to the OAS' mission to support the peace process and to the justice and peace law has positioned us as a leader and trusted partner in Colombia, with government and civil society alike.

Canada can be rightly proud of the partnership we have developed with Colombia. It is a relationship that can be strengthened further for the benefit of both countries through this agreement under debate today.

For a country like Colombia, free trade can open up new avenues for success. By promoting economic development and opening up new doors to prosperity, free trade agreements like this can strengthen the social foundations of countries. This growth can help solidify efforts by the government of Colombia to create a more prosperous, equitable and secure democracy.

In other words, we believe that economic opportunity goes hand in hand with democracy, peace and security. We believe firmly that economic opportunities can reinforce these objectives. That is why we are committed to being a helpful and open partner for nations throughout the hemisphere, nations like Colombia.

Often over the years we have known that there has been a human trafficking issue in Colombia. With the free trade, where jobs are opened up and opportunities are produced, this helps all aspects of this kind of society.

•(1715)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to echo comments I heard earlier. I believe every member in the House is a proponent for human rights and that no right-thinking person advocates violence against any person because of one's political beliefs. I would like to make that point clear.

The question really is one of philosophy. The question is whether we as a country should be making trade deals with countries that have murderous records. The question should be this. Should we make countries demonstrate an improvement first before we sign economic trade pacts with them or should we sign trade pacts with them first when their murder rates of trade unionists has gone up 18% in the last year?

I want to talk a bit about philosophy because I have heard my colleagues in the Liberal Party talk about supporting free trade. I guess it depends what year that party is in. In 1988 the Liberal Party did not support free trade. In 1993 it promised to abrogate the NAFTA. Little did we know then but it did not keep its promise. It was opposed to free trade at that time but today we hear that it supports free trade.

The Deputy Speaker: I have to cut off the hon. member and ask him to wrap up his question.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, since we are ahead of trade agreements at this point, should we make Colombia demonstrate improvement before we sign a free trade agreement with it?

Mrs. Joy Smith: Mr. Speaker, some of his comments I have to disagree with and perhaps ask my hon. colleague to double check some facts.

When we talk about murder rates, the homicide rates have dropped by 44% in Colombia and moderate poverty has fallen from 55% to 45%. Many very positive things are happening in Colombia now.

Government Orders

When we talk about this business with unions and free trade, a very poignant point is the new project coordinated by the United Nations development program. By bringing together, for the first time, the Colombian government and Colombian labour unions, a lot of good things will result from that.

When they conduct a joint evaluation of violence against union leaders and organized union members together and develop new ideas to provide legislation for their protection, we take a step in the right direction. This trade agreement is a step in the right direction for both countries.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the NDP ideological disdain for free trade, would the member for Kildonan—St. Paul agree that free trade creates economic opportunity for people right across the socio-economic spectrum and does that not improve chances for freedom, democracy and human dignity?

Mrs. Joy Smith: Mr. Speaker, clearly this is one of the major aspects about the free trade agreement. Building prosperity in a country does much to enhance the justice and the focus on the vision that individual Colombians can have for their lives.

We know right now there are issues in Colombia around ex-combatant children. It is estimated that 11,000 or more Colombian boys and girls have been participants in the army. We know people have been displaced. We know the exploitation forms of child work and HIV is a growing threat and human trafficking has been a threat. A free trade agreement is one more tool, or one more piece of the puzzle, that builds the prosperity in a country that will enable people to have a new vision for their lives.

A few minutes ago I talked about the homicide rates dropping by 44%. That is worth noting. As well, kidnappings have decreased by 87% between 2002 and 2008. These are some very good reasons why the free trade agreement is a real positive thing for Colombia.

● (1720)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with interest but also with great concern that I am rising today for the third time to address Bill C-23, Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act.

I want to mention again that the Bloc Québécois will vote against this agreement, because a free trade agreement with Colombia raises very serious issues, particularly since that country has the worst performance in its hemisphere when it comes to human rights.

As with the agreement signed with Peru, the Conservative government presented Parliament with an agreement that had already been negotiated and reached with Colombia, before Parliament even had the opportunity to review it in depth. At the time, I was a member of the Standing Committee on International Trade. We visited Colombia and we met with a number of stakeholders from that country, including unions, social groups, businesspeople and government members. The committee was to submit a report to the government, along with recommendations on the situation in Colombia. However, the Conservative government signed an agreement before the report was even tabled. That is really a waste of public money. A delegation of committee members is sent to

Colombia to review the situation and then the government signs an agreement without even taking into consideration the committee's recommendations. Once again, the Conservatives, who claim to know how to run this country's affairs, squandered the taxpayers' money.

It is important to remind hon. members that the free trade agreement with Colombia was announced on June 7, 2008, when the committee was carrying out its study, prior to submitting its report to the House.

I was a member of the Standing Committee on International Trade and I did make that trip to Colombia. We travelled through that country and we met with socio-economic stakeholders, union leaders, social groups and members of the government. We were shocked and appalled by the scope of the tragedy created by population displacements. Mining companies and agribusinesses have displaced some 250,000 persons and these people are currently parked on an area of about 50 square kilometres. The government does not care. These people are given bread and a bit of water, and some measures are quietly being taken to support them, so that they do not die.

I did not hear anything on that from government members. What is going to happen to the 250,000 people who were displaced? That issue is not raised in the House. We know that there is a trade agreement, supposedly to promote free trade with Colombia. It is not a trade agreement that we are talking about in this House, but an agreement that helps protect the investments of some Canadian businesses in that country. Indeed, the agreement as such talks a bit about the trading of grain from western Canada, but in the end it has a lot more to do with Canadian mining companies in Colombia.

We know very well that these companies have supported the displacement of communities and have no respect for environmental standards. In the previous session, I was distressed as well to see a Liberal member moving a motion to encourage companies to be socially responsible in the course of their activities.

● (1725)

I note in this House that while we are voting and the Liberals are moving this sort of motion on social responsibility for companies, they are voting in favour of the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement. It is shameful to see that over 300,000 persons were relocated in 2007-08 and that over 380,000 persons have had to flee their homes or workplaces because of violence.

To close this debate, we reported today the number of assassinations of trade unionists in the past two years. We have here a long list, which includes the assassination of Rafael Antonio Sepúlveda Lara on August 20—just recently.

Since the agreement was signed, union members in Colombia, people who want to protect their rights and interests, continue to be assassinated. The human rights of these people are not respected. I am convinced that the signing of a free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia will in no way reduce the number of union members assassinated. This is not what is needed. An agreement in this House will not ensure a better fate for the 300,000 people who have been displaced by mining companies and agrifood businesses. It will not.

It will simply benefit certain mining companies by offering better protection of their investments. Some people in this country may become rich as a result. Thirty members of the current government in the Congress are facing court proceedings for associating with Colombian paramilitaries. Increased revenues for the state does not mean the government will help the most disadvantaged or ensure better conditions and quality of life for the victims of violence in the society.

This government will not see to it that the 250,000 or 300,000 persons who have been displaced and are dying of hunger in shantytowns will have a better life. It will not. I am convinced this agreement will not resolve this situation.

How will we help Colombians? The government talks of humanitarian aid here, of support for this country to help it build a fairer democracy and a fairer and more just society.

It talks too about fairer trade. It is intervening to bring this debate to a close. It is intervening in various countries. It talks about Afghanistan. It says it is intervening in these countries in order to support and defend women's rights. We know that this hides other things, but the peacekeepers intervene. I wonder if this is not what is needed in Colombia given all the assassinations and the number of people displaced.

I reiterate that, for all these reasons and many others, this is not a trade agreement but an agreement to protect the investments of businesses. We in the Bloc will oppose this agreement, which in no way meets the needs of the people of Colombia and even less the needs of the people of Quebec and Canada.

• (1730)

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

CRIMINAL CODE

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-268, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (minimum sentence for offences involving trafficking of persons under the age of eighteen years), as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

Private Members' Business

[English]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Deputy Speaker: There is one motion in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-268. Motion No. 1 will be debated and voted upon.

[Translation]

I will now put Motion No. 1 to the House.

* * *

MOTION IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ) moved:

That Bill C-268 be amended by deleting Clause 2.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill clearly sets out at the beginning that it would establish minimum sentences, but it also says that it would establish minimum sentences for trafficking of children. The first thing to note when reading this bill is that there is no mention of trafficking of children in the proposed wording. There is no mention of sexual acts, except as an aggravating factor in one case.

Clause 2 states:

Every person who recruits, transports, transfers, receives, holds, conceals or harbours a person..., or exercises control, direction or influence over the movements of a person under the age of eighteen years, for the purpose of exploiting them or facilitating their exploitation is guilty of an indictable offence—

The important element in this definition is the intent: “for the purpose of exploiting them or facilitating their exploitation”. The word “or” is interspersed throughout the rest of the text. That means the offence can be committed in a number of ways. It can be committed by transporting, recruiting, transferring or receiving. However, the intent to exploit must always be present.

What is exploitation? I think we would all agree that exploitation is a very vague term that could cover a variety of criminal behaviours. That is probably true even if we are in favour of introducing more and more minimum sentences in our laws, as the United States has done. But even if we are in favour of minimum sentences, they must nevertheless apply to a specific offence and not to an offence that requires an assessment of the type of exploitation involved. What was the extent of the exploitation? What were the consequences for the victim? Over what period of time did the exploitation take place? Was it economic or for another purpose? What was the context? Was it in a family context? In some countries, families make the beautiful carpets that we will later purchase. But the details that we as tourists admire when we purchase the carpets are supplied by the eyes and the small fingers of the children.

A judge must determine the seriousness of the exploitation. We must not set a minimum of five years. Judicial discretion must not be completely eliminated.

While exploitation is not defined in the proposed clause, the clause is placed in a certain order in the Criminal Code. It does not appear just anywhere, but at 279.011, which is between 279.01 and 279.03 because of the way numbering works with decimals. It is not necessarily an obvious system, by the way. Most people would think that .011 comes after .04. But that is not how it works with decimals.

Section 279.04 of the Criminal Code says that:

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For the purposes of sections 279.01 to 279.03 [including 279.011], a person exploits another person if they

(a) cause them to provide, or offer to provide, labour or a service by engaging in conduct that, in all the circumstances, could reasonably be expected to cause the other person to believe that their safety or the safety of a person known to them would be threatened if they failed to provide, or offer to provide, the labour or service;

● (1735)

I just want to mention something important here, which is that there has to be some form of intimidation for exploitation to exist. Once again, the definition is very broad, and it focuses on economic exploitation, not necessarily of a sexual nature. I agree that if young women are kidnapped and forced into prostitution, that is a form of exploitation. I recognize the expression “sexual services”, which the member for Ahuntsic dislikes. At first glance, the definition is very broad indeed, and that is what many members thought. It covers all kinds of exploitation.

I am not saying that I am against all minimums. I think that there should be minimums for first- or second-degree murder. At the other end of the spectrum, I agree with minimums for impaired driving, particularly for reoffenders, where the individual should be informed of the possibility of a minimum sentence for a second offence. But I think that everyone will agree there is no place for minimums in cases where the judge has to assess completely unique situations.

I read the arguments of the member who is proposing this measure. It is clear that she is appalled by some sentences that are handed down. I do not believe that any of these sentences have been appealed. There are still shocking sentences among the tens of thousands of sentences handed down in Canada every day. Some are perhaps unjustified, but there is recourse through the appeal process. Before we change a law to make it stricter, we must first go through this process and see what happens in the courts of appeal.

The terrible thing about applying a minimum is that it is very often based on emotions. It is very honourable that the member cares about this cause, and I do not fault her for that. However, it is clear that her proposal is based on emotions. When this happens, a person is scandalized by a sentence that seems too light in a serious case. So they say that these serious cases should carry certain sentences. I think that in most cases, the member believes that the minimums would be justified.

Rationally, a minimum should not be set for the worst cases. A minimum should apply to the least serious cases. We need to give the judges some latitude. The least serious cases should carry a minimum sentence, and the most serious cases should carry a maximum.

We were harshly criticized for the position we took. Look at the section we had to examine. After giving such a broad definition of the offence, section 279.01 states:

(a) to imprisonment for life if they kidnap, commit an aggravated assault or aggravated sexual assault against, or cause death to, the victim during the commission of the offence; or

(b) to imprisonment for not more than fourteen years and not less than five years in any other case.

That is what we voted on.

● (1740)

Clause *a*) has been changed in the meantime, but what was remarkable about it was that there was a minimum sentence for the least serious offences but that there was no minimum for offences accompanied by aggravated assault, sexual assault or injury causing death.

To avoid a minimum sentence, an offender had to add something to the commission of the crime. Offenders are apparently concerned about and familiar with minimum sentences. That was the bill that was introduced. I think everyone knows it did not make any sense. In any case, it has been corrected. How was it corrected? They added another year, as if no one had ever thought of it.

This shows that the bill was hastily written and not even reread by the people introducing it or that this issue is so emotional for them that they could not even think straight. Their emotion led them to want to ensure that the worst cases would be subject to a minimum sentence but they forgot that less serious cases would be punished in the same way. That is what is wrong with minimum sentences.

There is another reason. I will give the hon. member the benefit of the doubt. I suspect that people in her entourage—we saw what some of her colleagues did in Quebec—wanted to have minimum sentences not because they thought it would reduce the crime rate but because it is popular and would bring them votes. I am perfectly aware of that.

It takes more courage to require rigour and precision in the drafting of legislation than it does to let ourselves be swept away by feelings that are largely shared by the public. How did they defend their bill? By absolutely frightful photographs of a poor little girl being abducted by an old man who wanted to exploit her. They said the Bloc was voting against protecting children.

Read this bill and show it to someone who is impartial and objective. Ask what it covers. Maybe he will say it includes the trafficking of children, but it also covers a lot of other things. Exploitation is defined in the act, two clauses further along. It is defined as causing someone to provide or offer to provide labour or a service by conduct that could reasonably be expected to cause fear.

Most people would need to have it explained to them that the hon. member wanted to say trafficking in children.

What the House needs to understand about the argument presented to us is that the bill the hon. member has tabled covers not only trafficking in children and sexual exploitation but a lot more as well. It is because of this “a lot more” that it should be voted down.

I would like to remind the House in conclusion of the Supreme Court’s decision in the *Oaks* case where it referred to the criteria that should apply before our liberties could be infringed upon. It said that our laws must be drafted with care.

● (1745)

Is it really possible to say that this bill was drafted in such a way that it targets solely what was intended? I think the answer is clear. Rather than taking a gun to fire—

Private Members' Business

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of questions.

I heard today that my bill makes no sense and that it was just drafted arbitrarily. I am wondering how the top lawyers in the country feel after listening to the hon. member, such as Professor Benjamin Perrin who was last month cited as Canada's hero for his work in human trafficking. He teaches, has worked at the Supreme Court and has worked in this Parliament. He is now a professor at the UBC Faculty of Law. He was one of the lawyers who helped me draft this bill.

I believe the real motivation behind the speeches today from members across is the fact that they have no intention of protecting children, the innocent victims of child traffickers. They have no intention of standing up for children in Quebec and all across Canada to protect them from these perpetrators.

Do I not have a right as a parliamentarian to be emotional about traffickers who want to sexually exploit young children? Is that not what we should be passionate about in this Parliament of Canada?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): There may have been some confusion. There are no questions and comments in this. The hon. member has a little less than eight minutes remaining in her ten minute speech.

Mrs. Joy Smith: That is good, Mr. Speaker. I have spent two minutes asking a question of members across and I think it was a good question. Now I will continue to speak at report stage to my private member's bill, Bill C-268.

First I would like to take a moment to thank the member for Abbotsford who kindly agreed to exchange spots in the order of precedence. The member has been a strong advocate of protecting our most vulnerable citizens.

I would like to make it clear that the bill was not introduced to address or solve the complex and clandestine nature of human trafficking. I want to assure members that I certainly believe that Canada can and must do more to combat the trafficking of humans within our borders and abroad.

Since being elected, I have championed a national strategy to combat trafficking in persons. I thoroughly agree that there are many root causes of human trafficking that must be addressed and resolved.

I believe that a legal system that routinely criminalizes victims of trafficking must be changed to restore dignity to the victims. The same legal system that ignores the men and women who provide the demand must also be addressed.

I can go on with many more initiatives, but that is a debate for another day.

This evening we are debating a motion by the Bloc Québécois to gut the heart of Bill C-268, to remove the mandatory minimums that form the intent and scope of the bill.

Bill C-268 was drafted with one clear intention: to create a separate offence for the traffickers of children in Canada and to ensure that the penalties reflect the gravity of the crime. This followed considerable consultation with victims, NGOs, and law enforcement representatives.

The bill would also bring parity between Canada's legislation and that of many other countries.

Dr. Mohamed Mattar, executive director of the protection project at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, points out that many states have specific provisions in their anti-trafficking legislation or criminal codes guaranteeing enhanced penalties in cases of trafficking in persons, including a crime committed against a child victim.

The United States, for example, has a minimum sentence of 15 years for trafficking cases where the victim is under 14 years of age, and a minimum sentence of 10 years where the victim is between 14 and 18 years of age.

The current legislation in the Canadian Criminal Code does not distinguish between age and offers a penalty between 0 and 14 years in most cases, and up to life in other cases. The suggestion that those who traffic minors could face no time in jail is not speculative.

The limited convictions in Canada for the trafficking of minors have more often than not resulted in sentences that are grossly disproportioned to the offence.

Last year, Montreal resident Michael Lennox Mark received a two-year sentence, but with double credit for the year served before his trial, the man who horrifically victimized a 17-year-old Montreal girl over two years walked out of jail a few days after being convicted.

I have spoken previously of Imani Nakpangi, who received a sentence of three years for the offence of trafficking a 15-year-old Ontario girl. After selling her body over and over each day for two years, raking in profits of at least \$360,000, Imani Nakpangi was credited 13 months for time served.

There are few other injustices that can compare in severity to the utter devastation caused by the enslavement and auctioning of a human being, especially when this is a child. I am certain that no honourable members would dare contest this statement, yet there are members in the House from the Bloc Québécois who proudly oppose the bill, claiming it is a bad law.

Let us be clear about one thing: the opposition of the Bloc Québécois to mandatory minimums for the trafficking of minors is not only reprehensible, it is unacceptable in our country. To openly oppose serious penalties for those who sell and abuse the bodies of minors does not just suggest approval for this horrific abuse of human rights, it virtually endorses this grave form of exploitation.

Over the summer, the Bloc Québécois member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin first suggested that Bill C-268 is a bad law because it has no minimum sentence for aggravated factors. This concern was addressed at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, and a minimum sentence was added for aggravated factors.

Private Members' Business

Then the Bloc Québécois member went on to argue that it was a bad law because it contained mandatory minimums.

In fact, during the second hour of debate on Bill C-268 on April 1, 2009, the Bloc member for Hochelaga stated that parliamentarians will acknowledge that the Bloc Québécois' positions are consistent, that they have never been comfortable with mandatory minimum sentences. Yet, in 2005, Bloc MPs supported and even moved amendments containing mandatory minimums for the sexual exploitation of children. So what has happened since 2005? I implore Bloc members to be consistent today and support mandatory minimums for the trafficking of minors.

● (1750)

Finally, the Bloc Québécois argued that the bill is a bad law because it would result in scenarios where employers would receive a minimum sentence of five years for not providing proper wages to teenagers. This is an absurd suggestion. No prosecutor would bring human trafficking charges against an individual who commits labour infractions by underpaying a teenager.

The bill has nothing to do with labour laws. The Bloc is attempting to take the focus off the abuse and sexual exploitation of women and children by attempting to make the bill something it is not. For an elected representative of Canadians, this is completely irresponsible.

Maybe the Bloc does not believe this type of exploitation occurs in Quebec. The Bloc Québécois seems to think the worst form of exploitation occurring in Quebec is paying young people wages that are below the legal minimum. I have news for them. Canadian girls and boys from across our country are being sold for sexual exploitation and forced labour. This harsh reality exists even in Quebec, regardless of whether the Bloc acknowledges it or not.

With one exception, that is the hon. member for Ahuntsic, who courageously stood alone in support of this bill, the Bloc Québécois is the sole entity in Canada that has voiced opposition to mandatory minimums for child traffickers. The Bloc Québécois has chosen to stand against legislation that upholds Canada's commitments to the UN optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography.

Our children are not for sale. The price of inaction will cause us to have a lost generation. With this amendment, the Bloc Québécois has forfeited an opportunity to stand up for the victims of this modern-day slavery. Instead of fighting for the rights of children, it fights for the rights of the traffickers.

Years ago, a member of the British Parliament, William Wilberforce, a great abolitionist and personal hero of mine, was known for his eloquent speeches in the British House of Commons. In one of his speeches on the abolition of slavery he captured the essence of what motivates me to combat this modern-day slavery. He said:

Never, never will we desist till we have...extinguished every trace of this bloody traffic, of which our posterity, looking back to the history of these enlightened times, will scarce believe that it has been suffered to exist so long a disgrace and dishonour to this country.

History will remember those who fought against this evil trade and it will certainly not forget those who are complacent when faced with it.

Mr. Speaker, I apologize. After the last speech I thought we were going into questions and answers, because I had just finished the last debate. I was so taken by the absurd comments made across the way that I did ask that question.

I can assure members opposite that the top lawyers in this country worked on that bill. As one can see from my website at www.joysmith.ca, there is support from hundreds of law enforcement agencies, a letter from the chief of police of the Toronto region of Peel, and a lot of support from people all across this country.

I believe the Bloc Québécois is ignoring what Canadians want. They want to obliterate traffickers from Canadian soil.

● (1755)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to take part in this debate on Bill C-268. I am a member of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, and I attended the meetings concerning this bill.

First of all, I would like to congratulate the hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul for the efforts she has dedicated to this bill. I know she cares deeply about this issue and I would like to congratulate her.

[*English*]

It is my great pleasure to speak to Bill C-268 and to perhaps, at the risk of lowering the temperature just a bit as fall approaches, outline what the bill does. Under a Liberal government in 2005, my colleague from Scarborough—Rouge River was part of a team that brought in the first law with respect to trafficking.

That is found in section 279.01 of the Criminal Code. It makes it an offence for a person to recruit, transport, transfer, receive, hold, conceal, harbour a person or exercise control, direction or influence over the movement of people for exploitation purposes, which is defined further in the code.

Exploitation, which the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin properly sets out in this debate, is at the heart of what this law is all about. I think we all think we know what exploitation means, but in the end, exploitation is forcing people to do something they do not want to do that is usually for money or of some benefit to the person exploiting the victims and is done, and this is the key part as defined in section 279.04, in circumstances that could reasonably be expected to cause the victims to believe their safety or the safety of a person known to them would be threatened if they failed to do what was asked of them.

That is what exploitation is as defined in the Criminal Code and that is what carries over with this new offence. In other words, the new offence is like a branch placed on the tree of the good Liberal law with respect to trafficking, which specifically says that the same offence, when it is carried out against a person under 18 years of age, is meriting stronger sentencing. That is all this law does. The law says that trafficking is bad, that exploitation, which is the basis of how trafficking occurs, shall be punished. This is already in the code.

However, when it is with a child, our most sacred assets in this community, as every member of Parliament would agree, the sentences will be stronger. As the bill says, the sentences will be a minimum of six years in the presence of evidence of aggravated assault, kidnapping, sexual assault and attempts to cause death during the offence. That means the convicted person will get six years minimum. In any other case, there will be a five-year minimum.

I have the utmost respect for the member of the Bloc and his legal prescience to any debate carried on in the House. He is a former solicitor general of his province and he is the spokesperson in this debate. However, what I really think he is saying is that the Bloc is generally against mandatory minimum sentences and that it does not like this law.

I respect that if that is what Bloc members believe. However, they are coming out at report stage with a motion that says that nowhere in this law as presented is a mention of young people. We have just gone through the fact that people are very much identified by age in the laws proposed. It is there twice. I do not know what is not so obvious about it.

The second thing is to say that exploitation is so nebulous, that it is so difficult to determine what exploitation means and that therefore the harsh sentences of five and six years are out of proportion. I know what he is leading to, that the Supreme Court of Canada or a court in our country may someday read these debates and ask if we turned our minds to the issue of proportionality. The sentence is severe, so is the crime well defined? That is really what the debate on this law is about.

I and the other members on the Liberal side think the crime and section are well defined. We know what it means when a person traffics in children by exploitation. When that occurs, we know that five and six years respectively are adequate and proportionate sentences. As parliamentarians and members of the committee, we have turned our minds to that eventuality. For the member from the Bloc to say that exploitation cannot be properly defined in this instance belies the fact that there have been convictions already under the underlying section passed in 2005.

● (1800)

If he had evidence that the courts brought up the issue of the weakness of the definition of exploitation in section 279.04, he should have brought it forward, because I have seen nothing where judges have complained about the definition of exploitation.

[*Translation*]

The Liberal Party has always been against human trafficking, especially when it involves children. My colleague Raymond Simard from Saint Boniface gave me a letter from the Missionary Oblate

Private Members' Business

Sisters of St. Boniface. I would like to read the letter, which expresses support for this bill:

We, the Missionary Oblate Sisters of St. Boniface, are committed to fighting the terrible scourge of trafficking in women and children. We wish to condemn anything having to do with human trafficking throughout the world, especially in Canada and right here in Manitoba.

That letter was signed by Sister Cécile Fortier.

● (1805)

[*English*]

Again, there is a letter in support from the Catholic Women's League. The Canadian Religious Conference president, Father Yvon Pomerleau, in February of this year said:

In the global context where systems of oppression threaten the sacredness of all forms of life on our planet, the CRC believes it is imperative that we call on the Canadian government to adopt Bill C-268 in order to actively fight against human trafficking in Canada.

We support that. We want to do what is right. But what is really our job here is to make sure that the law as passed stands up to debate, scrutiny and criticism and is a law that will be used by our courts.

With that in mind, I, too, read the words of Professor Benjamin Perrin of the University of British Columbia law school. He certainly made the case on mandatory minimums. We on the Liberal side have nothing to be ashamed of with respect to mandatory minimums. I was not here, but they were brought in by Liberal governments. Mandatory minimums have been appropriate in certain circumstances. There has been great debate as to the implication, the ongoing onslaught of mandatory minimums everywhere, in the ceiling, in the hall, in the closets of the Conservative legislative agenda, but in this case, it is appropriate. In other cases it has been appropriate.

The lack of convictions thus far with respect to the trafficking offences promulgated in 2005, five convictions under section 279.01 and trafficking convictions up to the spring of 2009, being eight in number, suggest to me that this might have been an area of law that merits a mandatory minimum and a road map to prosecutors and judges to be harsh in these instances of crime.

Certainly my friend from Kildonan—St. Paul has made it very clear the egregious case of Imani Nakpangi making over \$360,000 in a two and a half year period by selling the girl notionally called Eve and selling her services is absolutely horrible.

[*Translation*]

It is appalling.

In closing, we here on this side of the House support Bill C-268.

[*English*]

I think in our remarks and the hard work done by members of the justice committee on this side and the critic, the member for Beauséjour, we have done the due diligence to make sure that the law stands up.

It is one thing to propose a law and it is one thing to get a lot of press for a law, but it is a much better thing as parliamentarians to work together to make sure it stands up, is legal and will stand the test of judicial scrutiny.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will start off by saying that a great deal of what we just heard from the member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe is the same position I will be taking. I endorse a good deal of his comments.

I want to raise some cautions. I want to take this opportunity to attack the government. I know that comes as a real surprise, if not a shock, to my colleagues on the other side of the House. Before I attack the government, I want to praise the work that the member for Kildonan—St. Paul has done on this subject, oftentimes with a great deal of frustration with her own government. She does not express that but I certainly have a sentiment that she feels it quite substantially from time to time.

It is important to know that the motion brought by the Bloc is really an attempt to gut this bill. I do not think there is any other way of addressing it. It does not go to the essence of what the debate is about, but it is the Bloc's attempt to gut the bill.

The attack on the government really takes two parts. One is it has clearly abandoned its responsibility of dealing with the problem of human trafficking. We heard evidence in committee that even though the law was passed in 2005 specifically dealing with human trafficking by the previous Liberal government, since that time we have had, and this is an approximation, only about a dozen charges under the law.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Less.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, my friend from Abitibi—Témiscamingue points out that it is less than that. I would tend to agree with him, although there have been a couple more that he may not have seen during the summer. I think we are up to about a dozen now. That is how many charges there have been, not convictions, just how many charges there have been. I think there have been less than half a dozen convictions.

The estimates that we have been able to get are wide ranging, from a minimum of 1,000 cases a year of human trafficking in Canada, both domestic and international that come through Canada, to perhaps as many as 10,000. That is how many cases there have been, something in that range. That is a huge variance, but even if we take the lowest figure of 1,000 that I think just about everybody agrees to, having only 12 prosecutions, approximately, over that period of time is absolutely shameful.

What it reflects, again being critical of the government, is a lack of resources and, quite frankly, a lack of training for police officers and prosecutors. We are beginning to see that change. The first charges only came down in the last 12 months, so they are beginning to get on to it. They have taken some training and they are beginning to prosecute, but the resources do not exist.

That is something for which the government clearly has to take some responsibility, including the present government. It has been in power long enough that this issue should have been addressed so that more adequate resources are given to our prosecutors and police forces.

The second criticism is that both at the time we passed the original amendments incorporating the concept of human trafficking into the code as an offence with imposed penalties at that time and now being

increased in this bill, what should have happened, and I say this from having spoken to a number of agencies that deal with victims of human trafficking, is we should have been looking at changes in policy and legislation under our immigration legislation.

All too often what happens when a case is identified and a charge is laid, the victim of the crime, oftentimes a young person, as the member for Kildonan—St. Paul set out so eloquently, and in most cases is a woman, is kept in the country long enough for the prosecution to go ahead and then is immediately deported, oftentimes back to the same country from where the young woman came. Oftentimes she is subjected once again to human trafficking crimes, maybe to another country, occasionally back to Canada.

• (1810)

About a year ago there was a documentary on trafficking in England. It identified one victim who had been trafficked into England six times from central eastern Europe.

The way around that is to look at our immigration laws to see if we can keep the person here at least for an extended period of time so the person no longer will be victimized. That is another area the current government has not looked at, nor did the previous government when we passed the law in 2005.

We need corresponding changes to policy and perhaps amendments to the immigration act so that if we do identify victims of human trafficking, they are given some special categorization under that legislation and those laws in order to be able to remain in the country at least long enough so that they are safe from further persecution and abuse.

Those two things have to be done. We need more resources in this area.

Sister Helen Petrimoulx is the head of our refugee agency in the city of Windsor and is a strong proponent of further action by government in enforcing the laws and prosecuting these charges. She spoke about the need for this but very eloquently spoke also of the need for looking at the victim not just as someone who is a witness in a criminal trial, but somebody who needs the assistance of our state in order to be taken care of. She told me of some of the really tragic stories that have occurred in the Windsor area, because that area is one of the conduit areas from Canada into the United States and vice versa.

The final point I want to make is with regard to the legislation we passed in 2005. I do not think it needs to be addressed in this bill. It should have been addressed in 2005 and it certainly should be addressed now. It has to do with greater penalties for those in the organized crime element who to a great degree are the masterminds behind these offences.

Private Members' Business

One of the concerns I have in that regard is that in February of this year the United Nations came out with a very extensive report on human trafficking. One of the shocking patterns that it demonstrated in the statistics it had gathered was that in more than 50% of the cases around the globe, it is women who are charged with human trafficking. Having been almost invariably themselves victims of it, they are then pressed into the same trade by almost exclusively men who are involved in organized crime gangs. The people that we are catching and prosecuting in the majority around the globe are women who themselves were victims at one time. One cannot help but think if we had got to them earlier they would not have been prosecuted because we would have got them out of the system.

What we need to do with regard to this is look at severe penalties, specifically against the organized crime syndicates, both nationally and internationally. We know the Hells Angels and the biker gangs are trafficking. We know they are using the street gangs to help them. We know they have connections with international crime syndicates. We have to go after them.

This is not meant to be in any way disrespectful to my colleague, the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, but this legislation is only going to scratch the surface. It is going to affect those people under 18, and that is a good measure, but there is much more work that needs to be done, both practically on the street with our police and in the courts with our prosecutors and judges, and with our immigration law.

• (1815)

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity to review the Bloc Québécois' proposed amendment to Bill C-268 put forth by the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin yesterday which would delete clause 2 of the bill.

I welcome this opportunity to share my views with hon. members and trust that they will all see as clearly as I do why we must vote against this proposed amendment.

I am both distressed and puzzled by this proposal. I believe that anyone who reads the bill would readily agree that clause 2 is the heart of Bill C-268. It is the very clause that achieves this laudable objective. Without clause 2, there would be no stricter penalties for those who would target children to subject them to some of the worse forms of exploitation.

In short, if we were to support this proposed amendment there would be no mandatory minimum penalties for the offence of trafficking in children, which is the express purpose of the bill.

We have heard about this terrible crime and its effect on victims, how victims who are forced to provide labour or services out of fear for their own safety or the safety of someone known to them. We have heard that trafficking in persons disproportionately affects children. We know that UNICEF's estimates indicate that as many as 1.2 million children are trafficked globally each year.

In the face of these horrible facts, why would we not want to strengthen our criminal laws to ensure that those who would abuse children in this way are brought to justice?

As the House knows, my riding in Mississauga in the region of Peel is very close to the Toronto airport. The Toronto airport, being located in the Peel region, experiences every year many children

who arrive at the Toronto airport unescorted by adults. The Canadian Border Security Agency often intercepts these children and they are turned over to the Peel children's aid.

I have spoken to Peel children's aid officials and they tell me that many of the children who are sent into their custody may in fact be involved in trafficking. We must do something about this. This is happening on our doorstep, in my home region of Peel.

As we know, clause 2 of Bill C-268 seeks to add a new offence of trafficking in children which would mirror the main trafficking in persons offence in section 279.01 of the Criminal Code. This new offence would carry mandatory minimum penalties of six years for the aggravated offence where the maximum penalty is life imprisonment and five years in all other cases where the maximum penalty is fourteen years imprisonment.

The justice committee has already amended clause 2 of the bill to include the six year mandatory minimum penalty for the aggravated offence. The justice committee amendment to clause 2 would ensure that Bill C-268 fulfills its objective of imposing mandatory minimum penalties on anyone who trafficks in children, whether they are convicted of the aggravated offence or the lesser offence. Therefore, to delete the bill completely defeats the objective of the bill.

The committee has considered the five convictions that have been secured under the main trafficking offence, section 279.01, since its enactment in November 2005. Some of these cases involve child victims but sentences range from a mere two to seven years. We need to ensure that traffickers who target children, society's most vulnerable, are held to account and that they pay for their unspeakable crimes. The current law does not adequately do so.

Clause 2 of Bill C-268 would ensure that these traffickers remain behind bars for a longer period of time. This matters. It matters to the victims. They would be assured that their traffickers would no longer be able to abuse them or other children. It matters to all Canadians. They would be assured that other children would not be targeted and that other traffickers would think twice about harming children in Canada.

It makes no sense to support the Bloc Québécois proposed amendment, and not just for the compelling reasons that I have just given, but also because deleting clause 2 would render the remaining clauses in the bill entirely meaningless and even incoherent.

Clauses 1 and 3 to 8 of Bill C-268 propose consequential amendments which refer to the new offence of child trafficking that would be created by clause 2 of the bill. They would ensure that along with the main trafficking in persons offence, section 279.01, the proposed new offence of child trafficking is referenced in the provisions that deal with the interception of communications, exclusion of the public from court, publication bans, DNA sex offender registry and dangerous offenders.

Private Members' Business

●(1820)

If we were to support this proposed amendment to delete clause 2, we would effectively be voting down the bill in its entirety. It defies all logic to support consequential amendments without supporting the main amendment itself.

The Criminal Code's provisions addressing interception of communications, exclusion of the public from court, publication bans, DNA evidence, sex offender registry and dangerous offenders cannot refer to an offence that does not exist. That would be the incoherent result of supporting the Bloc's proposed amendment. Effectively, what the Bloc is asking us to do is vote down the bill, despite the fact that the bill has already received overwhelming support in the House. We cannot allow this to happen.

As we have heard so many times before from parliamentarians, stakeholders and Canadians themselves, trafficking in persons is a serious issue. We must have a strong criminal justice response. I am very pleased that we do have comprehensive criminal laws attacking trafficking in persons. Three Criminal Code offences were enacted in 2005, as was previously mentioned. The main offence, section 279.01, criminalizes anyone who would traffic in persons and imposes a maximum penalty of life imprisonment for the aggravated offence where it involves kidnapping, aggravated assault, aggravated sexual assault or death to the victim, and 14 years in all other cases.

Section 279.02 criminalizes anyone who would materially benefit from the trafficking of persons and imposes a maximum penalty of 10 years.

Section 279.03 criminalizes anyone who would destroy or withhold identity documents to facilitate the trafficking of persons and imposes a maximum penalty of five years.

In addition to those important offences, section 118 of the Immigration Refugee Protection Act also criminalizes cases of trafficking in persons across Canada's borders, and many Criminal Code offences continue to apply to trafficking in persons cases, such as forcible confinement, kidnapping, assault, sexual assault and prostitution provisions.

It is, without a doubt, that law enforcement officers now have a wide variety of tools at their disposal that they can use to fight trafficking of persons in Canada. However, how do we ensure that traffickers get sentences that properly reflect the severity of their crime? I have already pointed to several cases involving convictions under the main trafficking in persons offence, section 279.01, that show that sentences imposed have not always reflected the serious nature of the crime committed.

To achieve this pressing objective, we must vote against the Bloc's proposed amendment to delete clause 2. We must support Bill C-268 as amended by the justice committee. We must ensure that those who traffic children feel the full force of the law. We must ensure that mandatory minimum penalties are imposed on those who traffic in children.

For all those reasons, I ask all hon. members to join me in voting down the amendment put forth by the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin and, most important, I ask all hon. members to join me in supporting Bill C-268 as amended by the justice committee.

●(1825)

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate our colleague for her work on this private member's bill. I know she has worked very hard. However, I would like to caution her and all of us with regard to certain reactions that could unfortunately be likened to demagoguery.

I was an MP in 2005 and at that time the Bloc Québécois supported a bill introduced by the now defunct Liberal government, which had established a new provision in the Criminal Code, namely the offence of human trafficking. At the time, we unanimously supported the Criminal code amendment proposed by Bill C-49.

Bill C-49 created clause 279.01(1) which stated that "...Every person who recruits, transports, transfers, receives, holds, conceals or harbours a person, or exercises control, direction or influence over the movements of a person, for the purpose of exploiting them..." must be considered to be trafficking in persons.

I would like to remind my Liberal colleague that, at the time, his government did not see fit to make a distinction between persons under the age of 18 and over the age of 18. The government at the time did not see fit to impose mandatory minimum sentences. In 2005, I believe that this House unanimously adopted these provisions which, to date, have not surfaced much in the judicial system given that we have only had about ten convictions. I will come back to that.

It would be quite inflammatory to suggest that any member of this House is not vigilant, pro-active or dedicated when it comes to dealing with the trafficking of children or sexual exploitation.

The question we must ask ourselves is what are the objectives of the bill introduced by the member? Does the bill contain the right tools to achieve these objectives? The member leads us to believe that the courts have not been tough enough or that there have not been charges in cases of exploitation or trafficking involving young children.

From spring 2008 to spring 2009, five charges were laid under section 279, four of them involving persons under 18 years of age. So it is not true that the courts have not dealt with charges involving persons under 18. The proposed sentences contain at least three: a five-year sentence, a seven-year sentence and a ten-year sentence. Clearly, under section 279.01, as it stands, prosecutors can charge persons under the age of 18.

Does anyone in this House believe that, in a properly constituted case by a crown prosecutor involving a child victim of human trafficking, any judge worth his or her salt would fail to take that fact into account?

That is where the Bloc Québécois and the government disagree. The Bloc Québécois trusts judges and believes in their wisdom. If the sentence is not harsh enough, prosecutors must appeal. Our colleague did not say anything to suggest that these provisions conflicted with charges for trafficking in victims under the age of 18.

I can see that my time is up. I would like to congratulate the member on her bill, and I hope she understands that we are just as dedicated as she is to fighting human trafficking, but that we would rather find other ways to do it. That was the argument we heard from the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin.

• (1830)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

BROADCASTING AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in this House to ask a question about the government's lack of support for our national broadcaster, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

At Battle of Britain commemorations on the weekend, I was thinking of how important BBC was to that nation in times of its peril, and I personally believe how important CBC has been to the fabric of Canadian culture. As a young Canadian growing up, when there were only two or three stations on the television and far less radio, CBC unified the country. It made me feel that I was part of a country that included people in Saskatchewan, Ontario and Newfoundland, even Toronto, where CBC Radio came from. I remember Elwood Glover, from the Four Seasons Hotel, was an elegant program when I grew up.

What has happened to Canadian government today? What has happened that it does not believe in CBC?

[Translation]

The same is true for Société Radio-Canada. Ten positions were cut in Moncton, the regional head office of the Société Radio-Canada. The radio programs *360* and *Tam-Tam* were cancelled. Radio and television services have been cut there, even though that regional station serves four provinces.

[English]

Radio Canada in Moncton serves four Atlantic provinces. It is the only office to have that regional mandate. CBC in Moncton as well as Saint John have had job cuts, and they have had cuts to our unifying noon program, Maritime Noon.

Given the government's preference for private broadcasters and its complete indifference to the importance of having a national broadcaster, will it not admit that these cuts of \$200 million and the failure to bring bridge financing to allow CBC executives, whom I have met with, the opportunity to have a plan, to recoup monies from the private sector through advertising means it does not believe in CBC? Will it not come clean?

Adjournment Proceedings

Will the next Conservative poster say, "Get rid of the CBC" and tell the truth, as opposed to these cuts by attrition, death by many slow cuts.

The point is that the \$200 million is going to completely devastate the corporation. The corporation itself has said that previous cuts were absorbed in a timely fashion, and they were done in a way to cut administrative and overhead costs, etc., but these cuts will completely obliterate the CBC we know.

The options are that the parliamentary secretary can get up and bluster that this is all the Liberal's fault. He can get up and bluster that it is CBC's decision or that CBC will be fine. Or he can say what I think is on his mind and in his heart, that he does not like CBC and government should get rid of it. I am just waiting for the answer.

• (1835)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I love the CBC. On Sunday night I watched the *Canadian Country Music Awards* and thought it was fantastic. I am looking forward to *Hockey Night in Canada*. I think it is starting in September this year and I cannot wait. I cannot wait to see all my favourites on CBC appearing on Saturday night. That is a great tradition in my house and probably has been since I was too young to be able to answer this question.

I have been gifted in some regard with a memory that goes back more than just the past few weeks or months. I can remember back to 1993 and 1997. I can remember how the Liberal Party treated the CBC.

I can look at how this government every year since coming to power in 2006 has increased the funding to CBC. Since coming to power, this government has increased the funding to CBC. It is more money than the Liberal Party provided in any of its three 2005 budgets.

Let us be clear. What we did not do was what the Liberals did in 1993, which was promise to increase funding and then cut the funding. In 1997 they once again promised to increase funding and then cut the funding.

How much did the Liberals cut? That is a great question. It pains me to answer it. They cut \$400 million from the CBC, a lot of money. What was the outcome? Four thousand people lost their jobs. So much money was cut that the president of the CBC quit his job.

That Liberal member may call that orderly. It was just done in a fashion that allowed the Liberals to cut here and there. Whatever.

That is simply not the case. What we are looking at right now is a situation in which all broadcasters, private and public, have seen their revenues decline because we are in an extraordinary economic time. There is no question about that. Their advertising revenues have fallen off. Key industries that spend money on advertising in large quantities, such as the auto industry, have had difficulties, and we know about them. It is not spending money.

Adjournment Proceedings

The CBC has a plan. This government has provided record funding to the CBC in excess of \$1.1 billion and it is moving forward. This type of misinformation that the Liberal Party member is spreading is simply not true.

The executive board of the CBC has indicated that even if loans had been granted, these difficult decisions in difficult times would have to have been made. Difficult decisions are being made by Canadians in this country from coast to coast. It is not something that we enjoy. These decisions are necessary.

This government stands by the CBC with a firm commitment to make sure the broadcaster has a bright future.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Mr. Speaker, the member is saying that he stands by the CBC. The image is that the government stands beside the CBC digging the grave of the CBC.

The CBC itself has said that while previous rounds of budget cuts in recent years have led to modest programming service reductions, it has focused on reducing administration and support services. There is effectively no more room to continue that type of belt tightening.

Future cuts of the magnitude proposed, \$200 million, would have to come almost entirely out of programming. Programming is exactly what the hon. member talks about when he says he has a great love of *Hockey Night in Canada*, the *Canadian Country Music Awards*, et cetera.

If he believes that, why did his government not offer the bridge financing? Why does it not take a more active role in supporting the CBC? It may be all right in parts of Canada where there are a multitude of services, but in some regions of Canada, there is nothing else but the CBC.

Long live the CBC.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member would be happy if he read the report on the future of broadcasting that was completed by the heritage committee last June. He will see that there are a number of good recommendations in there for broadcasting.

One of the things that we recommended in that report was an extension of the local programming improvement fund. Of interest to that member is that the local programming improvement fund, or the LPIF, specifically provides funding for those stations that operate in communities smaller than one million people, the types of communities that he is talking about, to make sure that there is funding to provide information and services to these areas.

If the member does his research on that, he will find out that this fund is providing exactly the help that he seeks to see.

[*Translation*]

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I asked a question in this House on April 22, and the reply that I got was really not satisfactory.

The cuts made by the Department of Canadian Heritage to arts programs in August 2008 really hurt the cultural sector. In fact, these cuts are going to be felt for a long time.

In August 2008, the Conservative government showed real contempt when it cut \$27 million in grant programs that allowed artists and organizations, including in the performing arts sector, to go and show their products abroad. The PromArt and Trade Routes programs were particularly affected. Some artists had to cancel their tour, while others did tour but lost money in the process. I am going to talk about this later on.

On April 22, I referred to the B.C. Scene, an event to which the Department of Canadian Heritage had given \$2 million. That festival was taking place in Ottawa. It was an event where artists from British Columbia were performing before foreign producers in order to sell their shows. I asked a logical question, namely why invest \$2 million in an event designed to promote products that artists will not be able to present abroad.

Indeed, the Conservative government cut several very important grant programs that allowed artists to perform abroad. I asked how these artists were going to honour the contracts that they might sign during that event. I felt that this was a very poor investment and that is what I told the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

I also asked him what he had to offer to Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, which had to honour contracts last June to perform in the Middle East. In my opinion, the answer was “nothing”, the minister had nothing to offer to Les Grands Ballets Canadiens. The minister was upset and said that this was completely false.

Yet, on June 17, the Minister of Canadian Heritage replied in writing to a question that I put to him, namely:

Are there Canadian Heritage or Canada Council grant programs under which Les Grands Ballets Canadiens could receive more than \$51,000 [which is the cost of its tour] to stage a production outside the country and, if so, what are the programs?

The answer arrived on June 17:

—there are no programs offered by the Department of Canadian Heritage which fit the requirements listed above.

The reply also talked about a pilot project, but there was nothing. The Minister of Canadian Heritage had nothing to offer to Les Grands Ballets Canadiens to allow it to do its tour abroad. That is the question I put to the minister and that is the answer I got from him.

I am asking the question again: what is the Department of Canadian Heritage prepared to do so that, from now on, artists and cultural organizations, and particularly Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, can stage their productions abroad?

• (1840)

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise once again and respond in the late show edition of the sitting of the House today.

We put this question to our hard-working folks in the department. They gave me back a book. There are so many things that they are doing. They could not possibly sum it up so that I could get through it all in four minutes.

Adjournment Proceedings

Let me first address the issue of BC Scene. I want to congratulate the National Arts Centre on an excellent program that brought established and emerging stars of British Columbia's vibrant artistic scene to the nation's capital. I know that I speak for my entire department when I say that we were delighted to provide the significant support to make that happen.

BC Scene focuses primarily on providing an opportunity for Canadian artists to share their work with Canadian audiences. BC Scene is a part of a series of biannual festivals focusing on different Canadian regions. It was developed by the National Arts Centre as part of its mission to truly be a national institution.

There were over 60 arts presenters invited to attend the festival in order to create new opportunities for B.C. artists. They included presenters from abroad to ensure opportunities for tours and so forth as well. It was an absolutely fantastic event and I want to congratulate everyone involved with BC Scene at the National Arts Centre in that regard.

The member cited a few numbers. I would like to cite a few numbers as well. The government is going to invest close to \$22 million this year to support Canadian culture abroad through organizations such as the Canada Council for the Arts, Telefilm Canada, the Association for the Export of Canadian Books, the National Film Board, FACTOR and Musicaction. Their mandate includes the support and promotion of Canadian culture, both at home and abroad.

If I got into the list of everything that this government is doing in support of Canadian arts and culture through our economic action plan and budget 2009, I do not think we would get out of here much before midnight. It is a very significant list of what our government has undertaken and we are proud of it. We think that the investments we are making in Canadian artists and creativity are going to pay a significant dividend not just for Canada but indeed enrich the entire world. Our artists compete with everyone and we are very proud of them.

To cite a couple of numbers, just this year we are investing \$60 million in new funding for cultural infrastructure, a further \$20 million in new funding to train artists and, because we understand how important culture is to our economy, we will invest over \$100 million this year and next in the marquee tourism events program to also draw tourism and related spin-offs.

We are investing \$200 million in the Canadian television fund, \$30 million in magazines and Canadian newspapers, and \$28 million in new media. Subsequent to that, in June 2009 we announced \$504 million in renewed investments in the Canada heritage arts programs and the Canada Council for the Arts over five years.

Members can see that the list goes on and on. The fact remains that no government has put more support behind arts and culture in

the history of this country than this Conservative government. I am very proud of it and this member knows full well the numbers that I speak.

• (1845)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary can go ahead and list every one of Canadian Heritage's grant programs, but that will not help performing arts organizations like Les Grands Ballets Canadiens travel and perform in other countries.

This is just one example among many. Les Grands Ballets Canadiens went abroad in June and experienced a \$150,000 deficit because of the government, because of Canadian Heritage, which cut the company's funding when it eliminated two programs: PromArt and Trade Routes.

This is not just for show. I did not ask for a list of programs. The minister once told me, right here in the House, that I had it all wrong, but he is the one who got it all wrong. He wrote to me the next day, June 17. I would ask the parliamentary secretary for leave to table the minister's signed response in the House. This is what he said: "Canadian Heritage does not offer any programs that meet the aforementioned criteria". As I said, that was for Les Grands Ballets Canadiens.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the member cites Les Grands Ballets Canadiens. I know for a fact that this specific group, an outstanding Canadian group, receives substantial support from this government, in fact more support from this government than it received from the previous government and more support this year than in years past.

Our government is standing behind Les Grands Ballets and the member knows that. She is simply not being fulsome in her question. She is picking out one part of it and saying, "It did not get as much money here as it would have liked but, oh, by the way, it did receive in excess of \$1 million in support from this government".

We are proud of it because we are supporting excellence. We are supporting artists when they need it, in a way that they need it, and in a way that will allow them to continue to thrill audiences and, quite simply, to continue to hone their trade and put Canada on the map as one of the premier arts countries in the world.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:49 p.m.)

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