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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, March 25, 2010

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, March 25, 2010

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*English*]

DOCUMENTS REGARDING AFGHAN DETAINEES

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, given that the opposition seemingly believes that the treatment of Taliban prisoners is a top priority for Canadians, and given the high volume of documents, we are asking for unanimous consent to table related documents untranslated and without prejudice to the procedural arguments now before the House.

The documents are mostly in English, but there are also some French documents.

The Speaker: Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have unanimous consent to table these documents?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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PLANS AND PRIORITIES

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, on behalf of my colleagues, part III of the estimates consisting of 95 reports on plans and priorities.

[*Translation*]

These documents will be distributed to the members of the standing committee to assist them in assessing the spending powers requested in part II of the main estimates.

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary for Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF)

respecting its participation at the bureau meeting of the APF, held in N'Djamena, Chad, from February 2 to 4, 2010.

* * *

[*English*]

PETITIONS

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand today and present part of the thousands of petitions that I am receiving from Canadians and in particular from the residents of York West who are opposed to Bill C-384 that would allow any medical practitioner to assist in death.

Clearly, my constituents, as many others, have very serious concerns and issues with this and have asked that I table these many petitions, which I will continue to do at every opportunity as they are coming into my office.

ABORIGINAL HEALING FOUNDATION

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise with two petitions today. The first is a petition signed by citizens from across the country calling on the government to extend funding to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, which will expire on March 31 this year.

As the petition states, residential schools have caused incalculable physical and mental trauma to aboriginal people in this country, not only to residential school survivors themselves but to generations of first nations.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation is fostering important healing processes through counselling and cultural programs delivered in communities from coast to coast to coast. The Healing Our Spirit BC Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Society of Vancouver is one organization delivering valuable programs, thanks to this foundation.

I am pleased to stand in the House and present this petition requesting that funding for these vital healing programs be continued until the need for healing is ended; a day that is still sadly in the future.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Second, Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by citizens from Vancouver Kingsway and across the lower mainland calling on the government to press for an urgent review of NATO's policies regarding nuclear weapons.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners note that the continued presence of 25,000 nuclear weapons around the world poses a constant threat to all life on earth. Canada has signed and ratified the non-proliferation treaty which is a legal obligation committing this country to work toward the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Accordingly, the petitioners ask the government to work to eliminate reliance on nuclear weapons from NATO's strategic defence documents and to reaffirm its commitment to the goal of total global nuclear disarmament.

[*Translation*]

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to present two petitions calling for a continued moratorium to ensure that rural postal services are maintained. These petitions are signed by residents of Ferland-et-Boilleau and Sainte-Rose-du-Nord, in my riding.

I reiterate, on behalf of these people, the need to maintain rural postal services and to uphold the moratorium with respect to postal services in these areas.

Rural postal services are very important because, in small towns, post offices remain a place where people gather and talk to each other.

These are small communities, and I am pleased to present these two petitions on behalf of these two communities.

[*English*]

SEEDS REGULATIONS

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition from approximately 100 constituents. They support Bill C-474, which is about the approval of genetically engineered seeds in Canada, which are not also approved in our export market, so this is a concern. They are also concerned about unexpected and unwanted contamination from genetically engineered crops. They are concerned with government seed regulations, and regulations of novel foods and plants with novel traits, which do not include assessment or consideration of potential impacts or harm from the release of these seeds.

• (1010)

INTERNATIONAL AID

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, it is an honour to rise in the House today to present a petition on behalf of many constituents in my riding of Ottawa South. I would like to recognize the ongoing hard work and dedication of countless members of the Riverside United Church and the Anglican Church of the Resurrection, particularly Mr. Norman McLeod, who took the time to personally meet with me on this important matter.

The petitioners express grave concern with the government's decision to cut funding to KAIROS with no warning or explanation. They call upon the government and the Minister of International Cooperation to reverse their decision, restore KAIROS' long-standing relationship with CIDA and reinstate its funding.

KAIROS is the human rights and ecological justice organization of the Canadian churches. Since 1973, KAIROS and its predecessor coalitions have helped Canada act on its overseas aid obligations by channeling matched CIDA funds to human rights and women's groups in Africa, Latin America, Asia-Pacific and the Middle East. It is a privilege to table this petition on behalf of my constituents.

TAX HARMONIZATION

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the last couple of weeks it has been my honour to visit with my constituents of Burnaby—New Westminster at public meetings. There have been hundreds and hundreds of residents out, all concerned about the HST that is being imposed by the federal government. I have in my hand a petition signed by dozens of residents of Burnaby—New Westminster and other areas of the Lower Mainland calling upon the government to rescind the HST. What they say is very clear.

The petitioners are saying to the government that they cannot afford the \$500 each that would come out of pocket as a result of the HST. They believe it is an unfair tax shift and at a time when so many families in British Columbia are struggling to pay their bills, they feel it is completely inappropriate for the Conservative government to impose the HST on British Columbians. I table this petition.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from approximately 50 of my constituents. The petition asks the Government of Canada to support a universal declaration on animal welfare.

ABORIGINAL HEALING FOUNDATION

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to table a petition from residents who are very concerned about the fact that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation funding is going to end on March 31. They draw to our attention something that we all know and that is that the residential schools caused extensive physical and mental trauma experienced by the survivors that was also passed on to future generations.

They tell us in very clear terms that the foundation has had a mandate in encouraging and supporting aboriginal people in building and reinforcing sustainable healing processes that address the legacy of physical and sexual abuse in the residential school system.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to leave a true legacy of action to the residential school survivors through an extension of funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to present this petition from dozens of constituents. The petitioners request the Minister of Industry and the House of Commons to amend section 36 of the Investment Canada Act, in order to make public the details of undertakings made by foreign companies during Canadian acquisitions. They further request that the Minister of Industry make public the undertakings made during the acquisition of Inco and Falconbridge. They support Bill C-488, Bill C-489 and Bill C-490.

A couple of companies in my riding have been taken over by a foreign company, Vale from Brazil. It has been a net drain on my community. These petitioners want this to stop in the future.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to present two petitions on behalf of constituents. The first petition calls upon the Government of Canada to support a universal declaration on animal welfare.

•(1015)

TAXATION

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition calls upon Parliament to change the tax laws to allow small-sized and medium-sized businesses to compete on a more level playing field with large retail co-operatives.

These petitioners specifically request that Parliament change the tax laws that allow retail co-operatives to avoid paying corporate income tax through patronage dividends paid out as non-cash shares.

HOUSING

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to submit a petition in support of a national housing strategy. These petitioners are calling for an increased federal role in housing, through investments in not for profit housing, housing for the homeless, access to housing for those with different needs, and sustainable and environmentally sound design, but investments that actually go beyond the one time stimulus investment in budget 2009 and 2010.

The petitioners are asking for swift passage of Bill C-304; a very timely request since this bill is soon to be reported to the House and receive third reading. So, the petitioners and I look forward very much to the minister's response.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to present a petition to support a universal declaration on animal welfare.

AIR PASSENGERS' BILL OF RIGHTS

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present two petitions this morning.

Thousands of Canadians are calling on Parliament to adopt Canada's first air passengers' bill of rights. Bill C-310 would compensate air passengers on all Canadian carriers, including charters, anywhere they fly.

The bill would also provide compensation for overbooked flights, cancelled flights and long tarmac delays. It would also address issues such as late and misplaced baggage. It would require all-inclusive pricing by airlines in all their advertising.

The legislation has been in effect in Europe for five years. Why should an Air Canada passenger receive better treatment in Europe than in Canada?

The airlines would have to inform passengers of flight changes, either delays or cancellations. The new rules must be posted in the airport and airlines must inform passengers of their rights and the

Government Orders

process to file for compensation. If the airlines follow the rules, it would cost them nothing.

The petitioners call on the government to support Bill C-310 that would introduce Canada's first air passengers' bill of rights.

EARTHQUAKE IN CHILE

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition, signed by many Canadians, calls on the Canadian government to match funds personally donated by the citizens of Canada for the earthquake victims in Chile. On February 27, an 8.8 magnitude earthquake occurred in southern Chile. The Chilean Canadian community has mobilized. It had fundraising events in Winnipeg, on March 6, where \$10,000 was raised. This past Saturday, March 20, 1,000 people attended a social event to raise money.

The question is, when will the Prime Minister give the same treatment to the earthquake victims in Chile as he did for the earthquake victims in Haiti and match funds personally donated by Canadians to help the earthquake victims in Chile?

* * *

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.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

**CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT
IMPLEMENTATION ACT**

The House resumed from March 24 consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Colombia and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the motion that this question be now put.

The Speaker: When this matter was last before the House, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster had the floor. There were 10 minutes remaining for questions and comments consequent upon his speech. I, therefore, call for questions and comments.

The hon. member for Mississauga South.

Government Orders

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I was here to hear the member's speech, and I know that he has some concerns about the human rights aspects. In fact, at one point in his speech he said that our trade agreements should have one common element; that is, that there is this respect for human rights.

The dimensions of trade with Colombia are not major. However, I think that the issue is, at what point in time does the criteria of human rights kick in and supercede the benefits of a trade agreement?

Second, I would be interested in the member's comments with regard to whether or not entering into a trade agreement would be premature, given the reconsiderations by countries such as the U.S. and the U.K.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I know the member is sincere in his concern about the ongoing human rights abuses in Colombia. I certainly hope he can make those views known to his caucus and his leader, because we are very concerned in this corner of the House about the deal that seems to have been concocted between the Liberals and Conservatives to try to ram this bill through, despite the egregious, ongoing and growing human rights violations throughout Colombia.

Just yesterday the Flanders government, another European government, rejected an investment treaty between Colombia and Belgium, saying that there was a huge gulf between the human rights rhetoric and reality in Colombia. Yesterday the Liberal trade critic said that what the Liberals are going to try to do with the Conservatives is to have the Colombian government report on itself. Can anyone imagine allowing elementary school kids to give themselves their own grades or criminals to choose their own punishments?

If one extends that ridiculous notion to other aspects of government policy, one can see that the government is desperate to ram the bill through. Canadians oppose it and say no.

● (1020)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, given that the United States Congress has yet to pass its own legislation, which has been before it now for a number of years, and given that Republican members of Congress said as early as last month that they did not feel the legislation had any chance of passing Congress with the Democratic majority in control, the question is: Why is the government, which normally likes to follow the United States in everything it does, trying to be a leader on what is basically a very unpopular piece of legislation?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member has been front and centre on this issue.

In the U.S., the treaty will simply not go before Congress and has been set aside entirely. In the European Union, government after government have rejected a proposed treaty.

Thus what we have here is a Conservative government, with some Liberal allies, trying to push this agreement through at the worst possible time. Colombia is in an election period and impartial observers have talked about widespread fraud, fear, and coercion being used by the government to try to ram through a puppet

election, and yet here we have the Conservatives trying to reward that government for bad behaviour on the electoral front.

The question that stands in the House is why are the Conservatives, at this worst possible time, trying to aggravate the human rights situation in Colombia rather than standing up to the Colombian government and saying that it needs to have free and fair elections, to stop the fraud and coercion and stop the fear the government is generating among the population, and to hold democratic elections in Colombia?

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this has been a real passion of my colleague over the last year.

Other European countries are denying free trade with Colombia, and I know there have been a lot of murders of union activists and people who want to make a Colombia a better place to live. If all of these other countries are not willing to participate in free trade with Colombia, can the hon. member tell me what the motive is of the Canadian government in wanting to participate in this free trade agreement with Colombia?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member for Nickel Belt has also been speaking out very clearly and strongly against the appallingly bad judgment shown by the Conservative government on this.

Why is it pushing the agreement forward at this time? When every other democratic government is taking steps back and trying to put pressure on the Colombian government to improve the human rights situation, why are the Conservatives rewarding bad behaviour, criminal behaviour, murder and the ongoing violence there?

I have to note that the Colombian Commission of Jurists talks about the military arm of the Colombian government, the sexual abuse of women and the ongoing murders. We know about the so-called false positives, the growing number of killings that are taking place and the paramilitary's link to the Colombian government. Yet there is not a single Conservative member willing to stand up for human rights, not a single Conservative member willing to stand and say this is an appalling human rights situation and that Canada should stand with the people of Colombia rather than a government whose hands are stained with blood.

● (1025)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to the Canadian Labour Congress, more labour activists and trade unionists have been murdered in Colombia than all other countries on the planet put together. Think about that.

In this country we have trade unionists and working people who gather to sit down and discuss with their employer the working terms and conditions of their employment to try get a fair piece of the economic activity they produce. Yet in Colombia, they kill people for this. Imagine in this country if 40 Canadian trade unionists were killed this year by paramilitaries.

I see the hon. member across shaking his head. Really? Stand up and tell me what is wrong. I would like to hear where he disagrees with me on this.

Government Orders

Forty trade unionists were murdered this year, and this is a country that the government wants to sign a free trade agreement with. There are other countries in South America who are taking steps to progressively mobilize their economies and to share the resources more equitably with their people.

I would like to ask my hon. friend what other countries in South America does he think are on the right path and with whom Canada maybe ought to be looking at having closer economic relations with?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member has been very sensible on this issue as well. I know that he has read the reports and that unlike a single Conservative MP, he actually understands the situation.

We have Conservatives laughing in this House about the death toll in Colombia. It is absolutely inappropriate. If they feel it is somehow funny when trade unionists are killed or human rights activists are killed, I think they should go and defend that in front of their constituents. If they think it is somehow funny that 4 million people have been displaced by violent paramilitaries connected to the government and by guerrillas, then they should go and talk to their constituents.

This appalling approach of the Conservatives, this disregard for human rights, is something their constituents do not share. Their constituents believe in Canadian values. Their constituents believe in labour rights and human rights, and their constituents, quite frankly, believe that the Conservatives are completely off-centre in trying to force through this bad deal with a bad government, when Canadian values are being repudiated.

I think it is fair to say that the Conservatives are embarrassing themselves today by trying to push this through when they should be aware of the egregious and ongoing human rights violations taking place in Colombia against human rights advocates, against labour activists, against Afro-Colombians and against aboriginal peoples throughout Colombia. They should be ashamed of themselves.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for recognizing me in this discussion on the implementation of the free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia.

I feel that this debate is very important because we do not all agree by any means with this treaty, neither the members of the House nor the people of Canada and Colombia. The debate we started yesterday will prevent the government from claiming that it did not know that parliamentarians were in favour of respecting human rights in Colombia.

We are still wondering whether the government is paying any attention to what we say. In 2008, the Standing Committee on International Trade presented a report on this free trade agreement with Colombia, which contained a number of recommendations, including the following:

The Committee recommends that an independent, impartial, and comprehensive human rights impact assessment should be carried out by a competent body, which is subject to levels of independent scrutiny and validation; the recommendations of this assessment should be addressed before Canada considers signing, ratifying and implementing an agreement with Colombia.

The committee said that in 2008. Today, as a member of that committee, I doubt that the report was even read by the Conservative members. It seems, unfortunately, that the Conservative government has turned a deaf ear and wants to proceed with this agreement even though absolutely no impact assessments have been conducted, as demanded by a number of groups, including the Bloc Québécois.

We tried in vain to find some valid reasons for signing such an agreement. There are none. The Conservatives and Liberals alike have only one argument to make: free trade brings prosperity; free trade fixes everything.

No one is against prosperity, of course, not myself or my Bloc Québécois colleagues, but it is wrong to think it can be achieved by signing bilateral agreements without any serious criteria.

Whenever we enter bilateral trade agreements, we should familiarize ourselves with the realities of the countries with which we are dealing. We should take the time to assess the consequences of our decisions, both within Canada and within our partner countries, and not just from a commercial point of view. Human rights are important.

In the case of Colombia, it turns out that the effect on trade between our two countries will be negligible in comparison with the damage that could be done to Colombia's ability to defend the interests of its own people. Even the prosperity argument collapses if we take a close look at who will really benefit from an increase in exports.

Contrary to what some may think, free trade is not always welcomed by the agricultural sector, for example. For small farmers in Colombia, an increase in trade also means an increase in imports. The free trade agreement with Canada, which provides for the immediate elimination of duties on wheat, peas, lentils and barley, among others, would be devastating for Colombian agriculture, which accounts for 11.4% of GDP and 22% of employment in Colombia.

Some organizations, such as the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, maintain that, as a result of the free trade agreement with Canada, 12,000 livelihoods will be undermined by Canada's industrially-produced wheat and barley exports and the value of domestic wheat production in Colombia will drop by 32%, leading to losses of 44% in employment levels and wages. These are serious consequences.

Another potential consequence of the competition and the progressive loss of market share is that it will favour the establishment of coca plantations because coca is becoming the only product with a strong export market that remains profitable.

● (1030)

The sale of coca, drug trafficking, guerrillas, paramilitaries, the link with power, corruption and so on—this is a cycle that is not easily broken and involves many innocent people. Clearly Colombia must develop the means to break it, and Canada can help. In our opinion, however, the free trade agreement is not the way to go about it.

Government Orders

It is not obvious from a careful look at the bill why the Conservative government, with the clear support of the Liberals, is insisting so strongly on approving such a trade agreement. From various standpoints, this agreement flies in the face of the concept of a responsible government working for the welfare of its citizens and the well-being of humanity. In the country with the worst human rights record in Latin America, Canada must create conditions to improve the situation, despite its economic interests.

Unless it is proven otherwise, it may be said that the Conservatives are not doing their duty. I myself am a farmer with a background in the farming union, and I tremble at the thought that, as I speak, unionists in Colombia are the target of attacks simply because they insist on fighting for workers' rights.

Still today, people in Colombia who try to advance human rights are paying with their lives. Even yesterday, people died as a result of an attack in the streets of Bogota. It is awful. And I am not even talking about the number of children, women and men who have to leave their homes and comfort because of conflict between the government security forces, paramilitaries and guerrillas.

Increasingly, economic displacement is forcing subsistence farmers and small-scale miners to leave their land in favour of the major agri-food and mining companies. Whole communities are obliged to leave. In this case, too, no significant measure is proposed in the agreement to remedy such injustices, and it is utterly unrealistic to think that such an agreement will help resolve the situation.

We have to ask ourselves why the government wants a free trade agreement with Colombia. We have to ask ourselves what the government's and the Liberals' real reasons are for wanting to ratify this agreement at all costs. Colombia is Canada's fifth-largest trading partner in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is its seventh-largest source of imports in this area. So, Canada has more important trading partners than Colombia.

In recent years, trade between Canada and the other Latin American countries has increased considerably, cutting into trade with Colombia. In addition, Canada exports primarily cars and grains, which represented 23% and 19% respectively of our 2007 exports, and most of Canada's investments in Colombia, as we might expect, are in the mining industry.

In my humble opinion, a free trade agreement requires a relationship of equals between the two governments. They must therefore be special trading partners and the level of the trading must warrant the lowering of trade barriers.

• (1035)

Let us be candid: Colombia is not a very attractive market, considering that trade between the two countries is quite limited. Might it be that the Conservative government's main motivation for signing this free trade agreement at all costs is not trade, but investment?

I wonder about this because this agreement contains an investment protection chapter that will, without a shadow of a doubt, make life easier for Canadian investors who invest in Colombia, more specifically in the mining sector. That chapter is

closely modelled on chapter 11 of NAFTA, which is in fact a charter for multinationals at the expense of the common good.

More specifically, chapter 11 of NAFTA, which, I reiterate, is what the investment chapter of the agreement in question is closely modelled on, includes the following points: foreign investors may themselves apply to the international tribunals, skirting the filter of the public good that is applied by governments; the concept of exports is so broad that any law that might have the effect of reducing an investor's profits can amount to expropriation and lead to legal action being taken against the governments; and the amount of the claim is not limited to the value of the investment, but includes all potential future profits, which is completely excessive.

That chapter has been denounced by everyone. When a law, for example human rights legislation, reduces the profits of a foreign investor, the government is exposing itself to enormous legal claims. Ironically, when the Liberals were in power, they signed a number of trade agreements containing clauses resembling chapter 11 of NAFTA. The Liberals were harshly criticized for their improper practices and stopped signing agreements like that. And yet here they are today, supporting Bill C-2. Why?

We are seeing a return to the past, with the job of determining the common good being assigned to multinationals. That is what is being done. That is what the Liberals and the Conservatives want.

I hope the Conservatives and the Liberals do not think these multinationals will be serving the public interest by giving the public the resources that are needed and working toward greater respect for human rights, workers and the environment.

The Conservatives and the Liberals keep hammering away at their argument that we have to support developing countries and help them to progress, and they are not wrong. The Bloc Québécois and I do think that it is our duty to enable other societies to make progress, and we have to give them all the resources they need to do that. But the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement does nothing to promote that kind of improvement. There is no significant measure in Bill C-2 to improve the economic, social and environmental situation in Colombia.

Let us not hide behind pretexts to achieve our objectives. Let us instead take these business opportunities to develop an equitable form of globalization that encompasses the ideas of human rights, workers' rights, the environment and honourable trade. Why do we not try to play that role from time to time?

The impact on the environment is another factor we cannot ignore. The side agreement on the environment does not come close to meeting the expectations of people who are concerned about compliance with environmental standards. This agreement provides for no penalties for non-compliance with the most minimal requirements and ultimately could be an incentive for Colombia not to move ahead with adopting new measures to preserve the environment.

• (1040)

The Canadian Council for International Co-operation report says that:

Government Orders

The ESA not only fails to provide a credible vehicle for enhancing and enforcing environmental laws and regulations, but it also fails to mitigate the corrosive pressures the CCFTA will exert on existing environmental and conservation measures and may in fact provide a further disincentive for environmental law reform.

Canada should be very concerned about this, yet this is exactly what the Conservatives and the Liberals plan to support.

This country should follow Belgium's lead, do the right thing, and refuse to sign this agreement because it will be bad for human rights in Colombia. Even the U.S. Congress has backed away from its free trade agreement with Colombia and does not plan to proceed without more information about the human rights situation in Colombia. We are not just making these issues up.

Free trade is meant to improve the lives of workers by providing them with higher pay and better working conditions. But here at home, in Quebec, a lot of companies are choosing to close their factories so they can take advantage of the lower wages and less rigorous workplace standards in other countries.

This industry-wide approach results in unemployment at home and promotes human rights abuses in other countries, while companies rake in the cash. Do we really want to make things worse than they already are?

Before being elected to represent my riding, I was the president of two Quebec agricultural unions for 11 years. As a member of the Standing Committee on International Trade since last year, I have had the opportunity to hear from many witnesses. As an agricultural union president in Quebec, I often took strong stances to defend the Quebec farmers I was representing. Had I done so in Colombia, I would have received serious threats. People would have threatened to kill my three daughters and me.

I do not understand why the Conservatives and the Liberals are so bent on signing this agreement, which will provide only minimal economic benefits. The answer to that is self-evident. All they want to do is roll out the red carpet for mining and agri-food companies that want to invest in Colombia, where costs are low and mineral resources plentiful. There are lots of opportunities for resource exploitation in Colombia. Labour is cheap too.

Unfortunately, this agreement will lead to the displacement of entire populations. They will be uprooted and exiled to parts of the country that are not their own.

My Bloc Québécois colleagues and I will fight this agreement to the bitter end.

• (1045)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has expressed very well why his party and mine believe that this is a bad deal for Canada as well as Colombia.

The NDP does not believe that the free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia will promote human rights and improve conditions in Colombia. In fact, we believe the opposite to be true. The Conservative government, with the help of the Liberals, is feeding us explanations. I would like to hear my colleague on that.

Mr. Claude Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

As I indicated in my speech, which was based on all the evidence I heard at the Standing Committee on International Trade, there is absolutely nothing in this agreement to suggest that the human rights situation in Colombia will be improved. Colombia has the worst human rights record in the southern hemisphere, and this agreement is certainly not going to make things better.

A number of interesting proposals to help us make an informed decision were made by witnesses. An independent inquiry could be conducted by leading international experts, who would be able to fully assess each point in the agreement we are debating today to ensure the well-being of the people of Colombia.

• (1050)

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his excellent speech. He mentioned an attack that took place yesterday in Colombia. We learned that, at the very moment the Liberal member for Kings—Hants was agreeing to what I would call a bogus amendment from the Conservative government asking that the Colombian government conduct its own assessment of the human rights situation in that country, an attack was taking place in Buenaventura, killing two people and injuring 30 others.

For a long time, that place has been a hub for drug trafficking with a high level of violence. It had been two years since the last violent incident. But the governor of that province, Mr. Juan Carlos Abadia, is now saying that he is very concerned about the upsurge in drug-related violence in Colombia. The attack was a car bombing near the public prosecutor's building and the mayor's office.

Such an image is enough to compel us to ask our Liberal colleagues to rethink their position. I wonder what the member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques thinks of that.

Mr. Claude Guimond: Mr. Speaker, my colleague makes a good point and is asking a good question. He is the new international trade critic for the Bloc Québécois, and I am very happy to be working with him.

In my speech, I pointed out the dangers of taking a stand in Colombia, saying that it would have been different for me if I had been president of an agricultural union in Colombia rather than Quebec. Yesterday's attack left some people dead and many others hurt.

I would like to bring something to the attention of the House and the Speaker. There have been Colombian families living in Rimouski for some time. Last summer, in my office in Rimouski, in my riding, I spoke with a father who still had children in their 20s in Colombia. I no longer remember his name. He is moving heaven and earth to get his kids brought to Rimouski.

It has been months, if not years, since he has had news of his children. They might be trade unionists and they might have disappeared; he does not know.

Meeting this father and seeing his emotion as he told his story tells me that, despite what some people think, there are still serious issues in Colombia.

Government Orders

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the speech given by my colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques. He is a real asset to this Parliament, as we can see from his speech on the free trade agreement with Colombia.

As he knows very well, and as all members of the House must know, the electoral process currently underway in Colombia has been very problematic. Impartial, independent observers have reported that the people of Colombia, who simply want a bit of democracy in their country, fear the violence, electoral fraud and intimidation perpetrated by their government.

Yet not one Conservative member has risen to denounce the Colombian government's practices. Not a single Conservative member ever stands up to defend democracy in that country.

I wonder what my colleague's thoughts are on why the Conservatives have nothing to say about the abuses of human rights and democracy taking place in Colombia. Is it because this government has allied itself with a regime that has blood on its hands?

• (1055)

Mr. Claude Guimond: Mr. Speaker, those are certainly legitimate questions.

After hearing all the testimony in committee, we cannot deny that Colombia has some serious problems regarding democracy.

In my opinion, the Conservatives and the Liberals want this agreement to be ratified, whatever the cost, simply in order to pave the way for big Canadian mining companies. I am convinced that a powerful lobby representing these companies has influenced the government. I can see no other reason. That said, I see no valid reason to ratify this agreement.

As we have clearly demonstrated, from an economic standpoint it offers absolutely nothing. So we must ask ourselves some questions, and I think the answer is obvious. They simply want to pave the way for Canada's big mining companies.

[*English*]

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to debate Bill C-2, formerly Bill C-23, and to talk about the free trade agreement with Colombia.

I would like to put some contextual form to the debate initially, in the sense of why it is we are authorizing a trade deal after the fact and why parliamentarians have not had the opportunity to discuss beforehand whether we want to pursue a free trade agreement with certain places rather than simply at the tail end of it having to put a rubber stamp on it, as the Conservative government and its co-conspirators in this deal, the Liberals, would like us to do.

If we are going to enter into free trade agreements with whomever across the globe, then what we ought to be doing in this House is actually deciding what the framework of those trade deals should be. The word "free" in free trade begins with the letter *f*, but it ought to be the a "fair" trade agreement, not a free trade agreement. The partners to it, whether it be a bilateral or multilateral agreement, should be equal partners. That includes those folks who work for a living, whether they be unionized or non-unionized, whether they be

in the manufacturing sector, the service sector or in the agricultural sector. No matter where it is they work they should be seen to be equal partners in trade deals that will affect them whether or not they want the agreement.

We are seeing with these trade deals the effect on us as workers in this country. I spoke to this before. A StatsCan report talked about income disparity in this country and it is a disgrace. The report clearly showed since we signed the first free trade agreement a little over 20 years ago that our income is either stagnant or declining. Yet the previous Liberal government and now the present Conservative government tell us that free trade is good for all of us. I beg to differ.

Workers that I represented when I was involved in the Canadian auto workers and workers that I have the pleasure to represent in this place are testimony to the fact that it is the opposite. They are not better off. In fact in many cases they are not even equal to where they were as far back as 1985. If that is prosperity, to be stuck in 1985, then I really do not understand the meaning of prosperity.

Sure, there is a small percentage in this country, and it is less than one and a half per cent, the wealthy elite, who have done remarkably well. I suppose for them free trade is a wondrous thing. When it was sold to us as Canadians it was sold to us with the aspiration that it would be better for all of us. This meant that the standard of living for every man and woman in the working world of this country would increase. What we have seen is the opposite.

This brings me to this particular deal and what it really means. How important is it to our manufacturing sector, our agricultural sector and any other sector that the government is suggesting are really important and we need to ram this deal through. When we look at it, it is infinitesimally small. It does not mean to say that is not significant to some of those players. Of course it is.

There are markets elsewhere where we could enter into a trade deal that would be fair in nature because we would be seen as co-equals. We would look at it from the sense of saying to one another that our rules are basically the same; our human rights issues are basically on par; maybe their rules are better and we could improve ours; our labour laws and environmental standards are on par; and the freedom in both countries is about on par.

Yet we are going to enter into an agreement with Colombia rather than some other country because it has less and somehow we feel that that is a fair deal.

With respect to this deal, when we talk about human rights, the argument being brought forward is that things are getting better. That is marvellous. That is great for Colombians. We applaud the fact that it is getting better, but it is not yet good enough to enter into a trade deal.

To suggest that somehow allowing multinational corporations to come in and perhaps generate some wealth for themselves will enhance the human rights for those who live there is a specious argument at best and a falsehood at worse.

Government Orders

●(1100)

We had agreement in the previous session. We talked about an international human rights group going in to monitor and help bring them out. Even the president of Colombia, Mr. Uribe, who was here before us, admits they have work to do in the human rights field. They themselves say they are not there yet. If that is the case, if they have the understanding and have actually told us they have work to do, why do we not let them go about doing that work and then come back to us when they have finished, rather than trying to ram this through before the president's term expires in another month or so?

Of course, he cannot run again because their constitution has a two-term limit. He already tried to get an extension of the two-term limit to three and was denied by his own supreme court. Now he will basically have to retire and go into another line of business, whatever that happens to be.

I do not see why we should shove this through so that Mr. Uribe can hold a meeting, hoist a toast and say they have done what they said they were going to do without doing what he said they wanted to do. He said they wanted to ensure people were safe inside his country, paramilitary squads were not still out there and trade unionists could be safe and secure and not find themselves under threat and murdered.

It is astonishing for me, as someone who comes from the labour movement. I look back to leaders of my labour movement, going back to Bob White and Buzz Hargrove and before that to leaders like Walter Reuther of the UAW. Those folks would probably have been found in an alley with a bullet either between the eyes or behind the ear if they had been in Colombia.

Because of the things they stood for, the things they spoke about and what they did for their members, including their efforts to enhance the ability of their members to move up that socio-economic ladder and get freedom of speech, their efforts to allow them to collectively assemble and their efforts to allow them collective bargaining, all of those folks would have never lived to ripe old ages of retirement. They all would have been dead by now. That would be a great travesty.

In this land, as much as a lot of folks do not agree with the trade union leaders who I mentioned, we do it in a civil way. We express our opinions and we debate the merits of what we stand for on one side and what we stand for on the other. None of those trade union leaders ever felt under threat, albeit Walter Reuther back in the 1950s was a different issue.

However, things have progressed from those days to the point where those leaders do not feel under threat, including the president of the CLC, Ken Georgetti, who is not afraid to walk across this land and talk about trade unionism, human rights, the collective bargaining process and the right to organize. The Supreme Court of Canada has said folks have that right under the laws of this land. It is an important fundamental right that we do not see in Colombia. As long as trade union leaders in Colombia feel under threat and duress, my sense is that this is not an agreement we need to go forward with.

What are we doing in Colombia? What is the benefit for us in Colombia? There is no great benefit for a free trade agreement with Colombia. Certainly, there are some power elites in Colombia who

truly want an agreement with us because it sends out a signal to the broader world that they should come back to the table to enter into negotiations with Colombia. The EU has walked away. It threw its hands up and said it was going to stop negotiations and was no longer interested in talking until Colombia cleaned up its own house.

As a member of the G8 and the G20, we see our partners in that club saying it is time to let the Colombians take care of their internal issues and allow them time to ensure their population is safe, their human rights record is on the upswing and at a level where trade unionists no longer fear for their lives and indigenous people no longer feel as if they are going to be forced off their land, allow them time to ensure the country has actually stabilized itself.

It is not to take away from the work that has already been done. There is no question that we are seeing a decline in the violence in Colombia from where it was 10 or 15 years ago. However, it is still not at a place where we should be in trade negotiations, not until it finds itself stabilized.

●(1105)

It is for them to do that, not for us to say we will send them a trade deal, we will send them some of our products and we will let some of our companies go into their country, and somehow that will stabilize their country. Governments stabilize countries by a set of rules, by the understanding of their populations that they respect those rules, and at the moment, that is not happening. The statistics clearly point to that.

Some of my colleagues will point out that there are not paramilitary death squads anymore; they are really narco-gangs. Yesterday's narco-gangs are tomorrow's paramilitaries, and vice versa. They are interchangeable. They go back and forth across that very, very blurry line. There is no question there are some narco-gangs in Colombia. No one disputes that, but no one can suggest that somehow they have demilitarized every paramilitary group in Colombia. That is not the case. The evidence shows it is not the case and we have to accept the fact that it is true.

In the end, if we know that to be true, then we know we cannot get sustainability in Colombia when it comes to human rights, the right to collective bargaining, the right to collective assembly and the freedom and democracy that we know and share here. That is why our friends in the club of G8 and G20 have said no to the Colombians this time, not no to them on a permanent basis.

But I think that is what the House needs to know about what the New Democrats are saying. We are not saying no to Colombia forever. In fact, we are saying yes to Colombia. We want to help it, to help get it back up on its feet. We will allow it and help it with those institutions that it needs to form.

Government Orders

I would suggest to the government that what we ought to enter into with Colombia is to help them strengthen their government organizations, their court systems, so that they can indeed move forward, as we did years ago. We had to develop ours and strengthen them, and eventually the rule of law in a free and democratic society like ours, where we respect it as individuals, will then be in Colombia as well. Then we become co-equal partners. Then we can enter into trade. Trade should never be measured by simply dollars and cents. It is about those who are affected on both sides of that ledger, which means workers here and indeed workers in Colombia.

In the agricultural sector, we see what happens to indigenous farmers when multinational organizations in the agriculture sector come in. When we talked to our friends in the campesina movement, they told us they have been pushed off the land. Yet we talk about how to help folks who perhaps are not eating as well as they should because there is not enough nourishment, not enough sustenance, because we need folks on the land to actually grow food that can be consumed by those who live there. When people have to buy food from abroad, they are at the mercy of the prices in the world market, which means that if they are poor already, they become not only poorer, but hungry.

We need to make sure that all of those factors are in play, that indeed none of the things we see happening today are happening anymore. It will not be an idyllic society. It will not be a perfectly peaceful place; nowhere is. In this country we find from time to time folks get annoyed at things that happen. We have demonstrations. Sometimes those demonstrations lead to the odd window getting broken. That is what we would like to see in Colombia: a time when demonstrations result in no more than a broken window rather than a bullet behind someone's ear. Then we will know they have got to a place where we can put our hand out and invite them to talk about trade; that will be the time we can sit down and talk about the actual trade negotiations.

My friends will talk about its being an addendum to the back of the agreement with labour laws, environment laws and the fact that we could pay a fine if there are things going on, or we could make a complaint and a fine would be charged against us.

When I wrote collective agreements in the bargaining that I did over a number of years, if we were serious about what we meant about something, we did not write it off the agreement. It used to be called "letters off the agreement", which for the most part used to be hidden. Those are things we did not tell the folks we represented. We gave them the collective agreement and we kept the letters off to the side. That is why we did that, because those were in the so-called clandestine semi-agreement between us and the employer. In my view, those letters at the back of the agreement are what that is about. It is about a certain group of folks saying that they know they are there and they know they can exercise them, but the majority of folks will not.

• (1110)

When people actually find themselves in a situation where they should use them, they do not even know they are there to try to exact a price that folks should pay as far as the fine is concerned, which I find ludicrous, to be honest. I know my fellow New Democratic colleague has coined the term "kill a trade unionist, pay a fine". It

seems rather cruel when we hear it out loud, but that is a reality. That is clearly what this piece of the agreement talks about.

It does not talk about how to stop it. It does not talk about setting up fundamental rights and freedoms for trade union leaders to actually go about doing what we consider to be legitimate, which is to organize workers if they choose to be organized, collectively bargain for them because that is what they have asked to be done, represent them in the bargaining process and, indeed, the grievance process and from time to time engage Parliament in advancing the rights of workers, which it believes workers are asking it to do.

In Colombia, we do not see that. In fact, my friends in the CUT, which is the largest trade union movement in Colombia, whom I have had the pleasure of meeting over the years, tell me this is not a good deal for workers. If Colombian workers are telling us it is not a good deal for workers, why is it we are so pious to believe that we can tell them it is, it will be good for them?

It reminds me of the 1985 debate on free trade, to be honest: "This will be good for you". The president of my union, unfortunately, told General Motors during bargaining in 1996, "You are going to eat Pabulum because I am feeding it to you because you are going to like it". It turned out they did not like it that much and they put us on strike for a long period of time. The bottom line is that because we think it is good for them does not make it necessarily so. In fact, I would suggest it is not.

What we should be doing is listening to the workers in the fields, factories and cities in Colombia who are saying, "No thank you. Thank you very much for thinking about us. Thank you very much for telling our government that it needs to do better with human rights. Thank you very much for saying you want to make sure I am protected. We appreciate that. We want you to continue that, but we don't want this deal at this moment".

They are not saying they do not want a deal. They are saying not right now. We should respect that. We should respect the fact that the citizens and workers of Colombia are saying to us, "Thank you, but not right now". To suggest that we know better than they do is not only insulting to them but it is quite delusional for us.

We are entering into a pact with whom? An elite? Because the government says it will be good for workers? We saw the results here and I mentioned them earlier. If we ask workers in this country if they are better off today, Statistics Canada says unequivocally no. It did not work for ordinary Canadians who toil across this land.

The proof is in the pudding. People always ask where the proof is. The proof is in the report. The Statistics Canada report clearly shows how we have done as working men and women across this country. We did not prosper. A very few at the top did. By and large, 80% of us did not. Therefore, why are we foisting this deal on Colombians and telling them they will be better off?

Points of Order

It reminds me of what we said with regard to the North American Free Trade Agreement when Mexico was brought in. We said it would be better for them. I would challenge anybody to go across the maquiladora zone and ask how people are making out. They are worried about losing their jobs to China, and yet they have the lowest wage rates in North America. Their wage rates do not sustain them in the Mexican economy. Yet they were supposed to be better off.

Across the globe, when it comes to free trade instead of fair trade, and I stress the word “fair” trade, which has in it many other pieces that this free trade agreement does not, what we need to be doing is saying no to this, respecting Colombian workers' wishes, respecting the citizens of Colombia who say no, taking a step back and telling them that when they are ready, when they decide it is in their best interests, the workers and citizens of Colombia should tell us that they want to sit down and negotiate a fair trade agreement.

* * *

● (1115)

POINTS OF ORDER

DOCUMENTS REGARDING AFGHAN DETAINEES

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order in response to the government's dumping of censored documents in this Chamber this morning. This purports to be the government's response to the question of privilege and the associated motions that had been placed before the Speaker for a ruling with regard to the transfer of detainees and documents relevant to that very serious issue.

If this purports to be a response, it is, frankly, an insult. It is an insult to this Chamber and to the rights of parliamentarians to request documents and to have those documents produced.

The government has produced 1 copy of 2,500 documents and put them at the table. Contrary to normal practice, it has not taken the time or trouble to make additional copies for members of Parliament. They are unavailable to the media so it could properly report what has been done here to the public.

[*Translation*]

This is yet another illustration of the contempt that this Conservative government's Prime Minister has for this Parliament. This is unacceptable to us.

Our party has been consistent. We have always asked for one thing: to have access to the documents in order to do our work. In other words, we want to supervise the government and ensure that it is acting in the public's interest, but without posing a threat to national security.

Having access to the documents is the only way we can ensure that the government is being accountable to the public through its representatives in the House of Commons, namely us, the people's elected representatives, the members of this House.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, the documents that have been tabled before you are highly censored. The order that was adopted cites the absolute power to require the government to produce uncensored documents.

Given the reality that the government has violated the rights of Parliament by invoking the Canada Evidence Act to censor documents before producing them, the House urgently requires access to the documents uncensored. What do we get as the government's response? We get a pile of censored documents.

This is a critical situation. If this is all the government has to offer, then, Mr. Speaker, I do not think you have any choice but to rule on behalf of the House of Commons, on behalf of the traditions of this Parliament to have supremacy when it comes to requiring the government to provide documents.

It is a sad day when members of Parliament request information and they are treated in such a contemptuous fashion by the government, which is why we are raising this point of order and drawing it your attention.

● (1120)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I hear from other members on, I presume, this same subject, I would like to share with all members my understanding.

The government did table two boxes of documents this morning. A single copy of each was tabled. Many of these documents are not in both official languages, which is why unanimous consent was required in the House to accept those. That was asked for and granted.

As members know, the usual practice of this place is when documents are tabled that are one, two or three pages long, the Table provides copies of those as a courtesy to members. In this case, as the Leader of the NDP has mentioned, there are many hundreds of documents and so, from a practical point of view, that was not possible.

Having said that, the Journals Branch has received those two boxes of documents and are proceeding with them on a priority basis to create a single set of copies for each of the three opposition parties and they will be delivered as quickly as possible. I cannot give you a specific time but I can say that the Journals Branch is proceeding on a priority basis.

In terms of the contents of the documents, the leader's point is well taken, but at this point the Chair is not in a position to comment on the contents of those documents.

I believe the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons was rising on the same point of order.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for making one of the points that I was going to make to my hon. colleague about the additional copies, which are being photocopied as we speak. As soon as the additional copies are made in sufficient quantities, they will be transmitted at the earliest possible moment to the opposition parties.

Points of Order

With respect, however, to the contention made by the leader of the New Democratic Party that the documents are censored in some way, I would point out to all members of this House that there is a point of privilege before the House on which the Speaker will be making a ruling once the government has an opportunity to make a more fulsome response to the original points of order.

At that point in time, and only at that point in time, will this House be able to determine whether the government should be compelled to release all documents in unredacted form. The point that the hon. member was making, that we were compelled today to release documents in unredacted form, is simply not true.

The government's position is still that the executive has the absolute right, on the basis of national security and confidentiality concerns, to release documents in the form that we have been releasing them. We have consistently stated that all legally available documents have been and will continue to be released. We maintain that position until otherwise advised by the Chair.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last Thursday, I rose in the House on a question of privilege on the issue we are addressing today.

The Bloc Québécois is extremely disappointed in the government's attitude. This is just another example of the government's bad faith when it comes to handing over all the legal documents and it is becoming a broken record. The thing we do not see eye to eye on is the precise definition of legal documents. Are they the 2,500 pages of censored documents that they just tabled, but are in fact totally useless to the members of the committee? We are still at square one.

When the committee receives witnesses who have read all of these uncensored documents and we, as members of Parliament, are to ask them questions, we are not on the same wavelength. We cannot get to the bottom of things if the documents to which we have access do not allow us to effectively question the witnesses.

I want to remind the government that Parliament's House of Commons is usually the grand inquest. Legal research proves it. The House of Commons is the grand inquest that gets to the bottom of things to see whether the government is being accountable. That is what democracy is all about.

For their part, the government and the cabinet are the protectors of the realm. At this time, I find that the protectors of the realm have many more advantages than the grand inquest. They are paralyzing the grand inquest.

I wish to remind members that the December 10 motion is clear, "...the House hereby orders that these documents be produced in their original and uncensored form forthwith."

By submitting 2,500 pages of censored documents today, they are not complying with the motion of December 10.

Was it so difficult for the government, having had all night to prepare this obstacle, to bring photocopied documents and distribute them to the opposition?

This shows once again the bad faith of this government, which continues to throw up road blocks to prevent us from getting to the bottom of the matter.

Not only did they not give us the copies this morning—the documents were tabled in the House, and they must be photocopied immediately—but, furthermore, having looked through the documents behind the Speaker's chair, I can say that they have been censored. Therefore, they are of no use to us.

This is another sign of contempt. It proves that the Speaker's ruling is urgently needed. The government's constant hoopla and all kinds of theatrics are attempts to delay examining the fundamental issue.

What this government is doing is putting up smokescreen after smokescreen after smokescreen. Last week, I quoted a number of authorities who have the right to order the House to produce documents. I will quote Bourinot:

[*English*]

...there are frequent cases in which the ministers refuse information, especially at some delicate stage of an investigation or negotiation; and in such instances the house will always acquiesce when sufficient reasons are given for the refusal.

● (1125)

[*Translation*]

I could cite several other passages, which I cited when raising a point of privilege last week. But we always get back to square one: only the House can say whether these documents are confidential or not.

The motion we want to introduce would allow members of Parliament to judge whether a document should be kept confidential for security reasons or made public. Not only will the members be able to judge, they will be helped by other people. There will be no additional filter.

The government's tactic is to give the documents to an eminent judge, Mr. Iacobucci, who will decide which ones parliamentarians will get. That is not the way things should be done. The opposition parties are unanimous in their view that it is the members of Parliament who should decide which documents can be revealed publicly and which are too sensitive from a national security standpoint. That is the basic principle we are asking the Speaker of the House to investigate.

Mr. Speaker, there is a pressing need for you and your colleagues to reach a decision because there are more and more cases in which the government shows its contempt for the House.

It is the 308 members of the House of Commons who represent Canadians, not one judge. In a democracy, it is the members of Parliament who represent the citizenry. They can always ask senior public servants or the courts to help them, but it is their decision to make. We are the ones who were elected to the House. We are the ones who are accountable when things do not go well. We are the ones who are accountable for the well-being of the nation.

Here is the evidence that this government is not concerned about the nation's well-being. It tries instead to use national security to hide the fact that ministers may well have made mistakes. And how does it do this? It provides documents and then censors them.

Points of Order

The other day I showed a document on camera in which an entire page had been blacked out. Then I asked how long it had taken to translate the document. It did not take much time. They just made a photocopy and said it was the French version.

This is another stunt staged by a government that is just trying to gain time and conceal the possible incompetence of some of its influential members. That is not good for democracy and that is why we are taking up the cudgels again and saying that the government's current approach is meaningless, unacceptable and contrary to the motion of December 10, 2009.

• (1130)

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is of course a very serious topic. This is not the first time this issue pertaining to the documents related to Afghanistan has been raised in the House. It has been raised seriously and conscientiously by a members of a number of different political parties. It is extremely important that the Chair treat this matter with the gravity it deserves, and we are confident that will be the case. However, it is also very important that the government treat it seriously as well.

The government's behaviour today in bringing these documents, whatever they may be, to the House in the condition that it has is really a lot of sound and fury signifying nothing. The government wants to appear to be doing something to leave the impression that it is being transparent with respect to the Afghan documents when in fact transparency is the least description one could use to characterize what has gone on here.

When the House opened at 10 o'clock, the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader was in his place and put before the House two large cardboard boxes. He said that those boxes contained documents pertaining to the motion passed by the House last December, related to Afghanistan. He indicated that they were not translated and accordingly he had to seek unanimous consent for those documents to be put forward. The House gave unanimous consent, as a courtesy, because there is importance attached to any documentation related to Afghanistan. However, here we have 2,500 documents, we are told, one copy of each, we are told, not translated and still apparently in redacted form. That is, and Mr. Speaker I think you will have to agree, highly unusual. It may in fact be unprecedented in parliamentary experience.

The government has known about Parliament's requirement for documentation since at least December 10. Indeed, an argument could be made that the requirement for those documents was known even before the date upon which Parliament passed the resolution. However, the government has known that Parliament requires these documents. Now, more than three and a half months later, it comes to the House with one copy, untranslated, of 2,500 pieces of paper.

One might ask, in this massive exercise of recalibration that apparently went on in the government after prorogation, did it disconnect all the photocopying machines in the Government of Canada? What has it been doing, with respect to this documentation issue, for the last three and a half months, that it comes to the House in such an unprepared way?

For now, tabling, under the rules of the House, has not actually been effective. The government will try to make the argument that it has had a little exercise in transparency here today by bringing in these documents and dumping them on the table, in two cardboard boxes, but that is not effective tabling under the rules. Substantively, tabling has not been perfected. What we have had is a show, a charade, but it is not legitimate.

I would call upon the Chair to note for the record that while the tabling of these documents may have begun in this chaotic and ad hoc way today, it is not yet complete and these documents should be deemed not yet to have been tabled, unless and until all the documents, whatever they may be, are available to all parties, in both official languages, as required under the rules.

The attempt at tabling that was undertaken today has obviously been far from perfect. It does not meet any of the transparency or information requirements of members of Parliament. The government needs, PDQ, to get on with the job of producing those documents, as Parliament has requested, in a very legitimate way. The obfuscation on the part of the government simply only serves to raise greater suspicions in the minds of members of Parliament and the Canadian public.

• (1135)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I go to the parliamentary secretary, I would like to clarify one small matter.

When I was responding to the leader of the NDP, I stated that the Journals Branch of the House of Commons was preparing three copies, one for each opposition party. In his earlier statement regarding this point of order, the parliamentary secretary said, "we are preparing copies". Could he clarify that? Was he suggesting that the government was also preparing copies, or was he referring to those being prepared by the House of Commons?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, what I was referring to was that the copies are being made right now for the opposition parties and copies are going to be supplied as quickly as possible.

The point I want to make right now, in response to both the opposition House leader and other members of the House—

An hon. member: Point of order.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I am speaking on a point of order myself.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The parliamentary secretary is speaking on a point of order and I will go to the member for St. John's East once he is finished.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I would merely point out to all members of the House that the unanimous consent was given to the motion that I introduced earlier today, and I want to again go over one line that seems to be conveniently forgotten by all members. That line is when I said we were seeking unanimous consent to table related documents, untranslated and without prejudice to the procedural arguments before the House.

Points of Order

I say that because for those who say we were compelled to produce unredacted documents today is simply not true. We produced those documents as quickly as we could. I would think my colleague would have been, quite frankly, happy to see the government produce documents as quickly as possible, but without prejudice to the procedural arguments.

We still maintain our position. The documents, at this point in time and perhaps into the future, will remain redacted where the government and the executive believe that issues of national security are at stake. We will always honour that, as we should.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): With due respect to the parliamentary secretary, he did not answer my question.

When he made reference to the copies being produced, was he referring to those that the Journals Branch was producing, or was the government also producing these copies?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. In direct answer to your question, the PCO is also making copies.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct something that the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader said in terms of responding to the request of Parliament.

Last week we raised a very formal notice and request for a question of privilege to be determined by the House. The Speaker gave the government House leader and the government itself time for an opportunity for the ministers who were affected by this to respond to the House. That was a week ago. That was not a time limit allowed to see if the government could come up with some political stunt like it produced this morning in terms of making documents that were censored available to the House. These are documents that have been available for some time. The dates are in fact stamped on them.

I have had a brief look at the piles of documents. Some of them say that they were released in January and some were released in February, which I assume means released by the government lawyers, so these documents have been available for quite some time. If the government had any intention of trying to deal with this order, it would have been negotiating and discussing with the members of the House opposite on how to do that.

Do we have some sort of indefinite time for the government to actually respond to the question of privilege that has been raised before the House?

This is a provocation and an insult to the Speaker, to have been given an opportunity to respond one week ago today and we have no response, but today a political stunt, coming up with documents that are censored, that are redacted, that we never asked to be tabled before the House in any event.

The government has chosen to interpret this order of the House on December 10 as a request and an order to make all these things public on the floor of the House. What the order said was that members of Parliament be given access to an unredacted form of these documents.

It was very clear, in my motion produced last week, that this could be done and should be done, but the government refused to do

it. What it is doing today, through a political stunt, is trying to avoid responding to the question of privilege and taking advantage of the Speaker's generous notion of giving it some time to respond. The government has not taken that time.

I would have expected, given the nature of Friday, when many members are not here, that we would have heard from the government on Monday if it had something to say. This is now Thursday and what we have is something he said in rebuttal this morning "here are the documents".

If that is the government's response, we would look forward to a ruling from the Speaker, very quickly, as to the state of this *prima facie* case request of privilege, and we would look forward to having that happen very quickly. This is an insult not only to Parliament, but also to the Chair and to the role of the Speaker in Parliament.

• (1140)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I go to other members on the point of order, I would like to make one brief point. We have certainly been in a position to deal with the issue of copies and members and parties will have to decide whether that is satisfactory or not.

Regarding the contents of the documents, which were tabled this morning, at this point, the Chair is not in a position to comment on the contents of the documents. It terms of whether the documents provided were those that ought to have been provided, the Chair is not in a position to do that.

As all hon. members know, the Speaker is considering the questions of privilege that were raised last week. This is clearly an important issue. I am confident the Speaker and his staff are listening carefully to the points that have been made by all hon. members this morning and that those will be taken into consideration when the Speaker delivers his ruling on those questions of privilege.

I urge if not some patience, I urge members to wait until the Speaker feels he is in a position to make the right ruling in this case. As I said earlier, this is clearly an important issue and I am confident the Speaker is moving forward with all due haste on this matter.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, to seek some further clarity from the parliamentary secretary with respect to the documents that were put on the table today in a form that was clearly imperfect, could he indicate to us if Mr. Iacobucci has seen the documents tabled today? Has Mr. Iacobucci cleared those documents that were tabled today, or are we now facing a situation where there are two categories of documents? There are certain documents that Mr. Iacobucci will see and will be asked to clear and certain other documents that pertain to the same situation which will not be drawn to the attention of Mr. Iacobucci.

There seems to be a double standard here in the way documents are treated and I think we need to have absolute clarity with respect to what kind of documents these are.

Points of Order

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, before the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government replies, it is important to mention that the House Leader of the Official Opposition brought up a very good point: are the tabled documents the ones that the government considers acceptable, and does this mean that we will later have access to documents that contain more information?

That is a very good question. The government's action demonstrates just how far it is from complying with the House order of December 10, 2009. I would like to repeat the order, which was very clear: “—the House hereby orders that these documents [which were listed] be produced in their original and uncensored form forthwith.” And now we are being told that they are redacted.

This is why the Bloc Québécois agreed to leave English documents untranslated. It agreed because that is their original form. The same is true for French documents that have not been translated into English. If the opposition is willing to make an exception and agree that documents be tabled in their original form, it is because it expects these documents to be uncensored.

This morning the government used the ploy of asking that the documents not be translated, in order to appear to be complying with the December 10 order. But the government was only complying with the part of the order that was convenient for it—not having the documents translated. I think that both parts are extremely important.

The opposition has shown good faith. Unfortunately, it seems that the government, with this act, has tried to react pre-emptively to the Speaker's ruling on the point of order jointly brought forward by the NDP and the Bloc Québécois.

I would like to add one thing. Earlier, my colleague from Saint-Jean quoted page 337 of Bourinot. However, it is important to read page 338 as well, “But it must be remembered that under all circumstances, it is for the House to consider whether the reasons given for refusing the information are sufficient.” It is very clear that it is the House that must decide. We can find mechanisms—the opposition is amenable—to ensure that the members can do this without jeopardizing national security. However, it is not up to the government to decide whether or not a document should be transferred to the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan; it is up to the House.

Once again—and this has been true of the official opposition as well as the Bloc and the NDP—we are willing to negotiate with the government on the method. But, in the end, it must comply with the order of December 10. Today's manoeuvre will not save them from sanctions if the Speaker rules that this constitutes contempt of Parliament.

At present, there is nothing to indicate that there has been no contempt of Parliament. I would even say that this morning's manoeuvre, a base tactic, confirms the fears of the opposition and the Bloc Québécois.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that you asked us to be patient. Naturally, the Speaker needs time and must undertake some consultations before giving a ruling. However, I believe that if we wait too long, the

situation will deteriorate, as we saw this morning with the government's provocation.

● (1145)

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me start with a quick response to my hon. colleague, the House leader of the Bloc Québécois. He seems to make the point, as others have done before him today, that the House order of December 10 is something that our government must comply with. I would point out to the hon. member and all members here that we are disputing that.

As I have stated on several occasions in the House and outside of the House, it is the government's position that we are complying with the House order, meaning that we are producing every legally available document. However, we maintain the position that national security interests, and documents relating to national security, and documents that may be injurious to national security will continue to be protected by this government.

The House order of December 10 did not even contain one reference to the concerns we have about national security. The House order of December 10 merely stated that all documents, without respect or regard to national security, should be tabled. We are disputing that. Hence, we now have a situation where the Speaker will be ruling on several questions of privilege regarding that very point.

What must the government, in the opinion of the Speaker, do in regard to the production of documents? This is a very fundamental question. It is a constitutional question. That is why the Chair will be responding in due course, once it has heard all arguments from the government. However, to suggest that we must comply with the December 10 order of the House is absolutely incorrect. That order, quite frankly, is under review right now.

I would also point out once again, in response to all of the arguments that the documents tabled today contained redactions, that all of the documents we are producing on a regular basis, the documents we have produced in the past and will continue to produce in the future, are being examined by independent, arm's-length, non-partisan government officials who only have two points of interest in their deliberations: whether or not the application of law is being followed, and whether national security provisions are being observed and protected.

The documents produced today have contained redactions. In the opinion of those non-partisan, independent public officials, redactions are necessary. Until we hear otherwise or other arguments, or other rulings from the Chair, we will continue to produce the documents in a similar fashion.

My hon. colleague, the opposition House leader, asked whether the documents we tabled today have in fact been examined by Justice Iacobucci. No, they have not. Justice Iacobucci has not vetted these. However, what we have stated and what is in fact occurring as we speak is that Justice Iacobucci will be examining all documents. His purpose is to examine the redactions to determine whether they are proper.

Government Orders

Therefore, the documents tabled today will be reviewed by Justice Iacobucci in due course. He will be advising our government, and in due course his opinion will be presented to the House for all members. However, it is an independent review by Justice Iacobucci, who will be determining whether or not the redactions are in fact proper. That is the argument we have been advancing time and time again.

Let Justice Iacobucci do his work. The position this government has taken is that redactions done by an independent, non-partisan group of officials are proper. For the opposition members to say they want to ignore all of that, to ignore 140 years of parliamentary tradition and demand the documents in an unredacted form now, without regard for national security, is improper, quite frankly.

We wait with great interest to hear from the Speaker on his interpretation of our position as well as the opposition's positions. Mr. Speaker, I agree with your contention and implore all of my colleagues to let the Speaker examine these arguments carefully and make a ruling. I am sure he will do it in a most expeditious manner.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question that relates more to the beginning of your intervention. After the leader of the NDP spoke, you began speaking immediately to give a few explanations. I would like to suggest that, although it was not your intention, perhaps one of your explanations does not hold water. I would like to raise the matter now.

You said there were no photocopies because the documents were not translated. But there is no connection between those two facts. It is true that the parliamentary secretary who just spoke asked for permission—and received it—to table documents that were not translated. But let us be clear: a document with all the text blacked out, whether in English or French, does not need to be translated.

The Chair, the institution you are part of, learned last night that the government planned to table documents today. Thus, there is no possible excuse, apart from contempt. All of the Chair's rulings are made in context. If I may, I would like to suggest that you consider the profound contempt this government showed for the institution of Parliament when it tabled such a large quantity of heavily redacted documents. This clearly violates the order passed last December in this House. Being the phonies that they are, the Conservatives said they had not had time to photocopy the documents.

Heaven forbid we should interpret your response to the NDP leader as giving support to the government's argument. I am sure you would never do such a thing. Exceptionally, we agreed to the tabling of the documents so that the government could give its reply. However, as Dimitri Soudas sends speaking notes to the government, it is changing its tune somewhat, so that it fits with what Mr. Soudas would have us believe in the halls of Parliament. Once again, this shows the Conservative government's contempt for this institution and Canadians.

• (1155)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I would like to respond to the hon. member for Outremont.

When I responded earlier to the leader of the NDP, it was my intention to make two points. The first had to do with the translation issue, simply pointing out that it was the normal practice that documents be tabled in both official languages. Because that was not done in this case, unanimous consent was required, and it was granted. That is one issue.

The second issue had to do with providing copies. If I misspoke, I apologize, but my intention was to reference the fact that unanimous consent had been given for the documents being presented in only one language. The subsequent issue of making copies is not related to that in any way.

I would also remind all members that it seems to me that the two central issues being discussed today, the first being what the government ought to do and the second being whether the government has met that obligation, go to the heart of the points of order raised last week.

As I said earlier, this is a serious matter. I know the Speaker is taking it seriously. The three points of order deal with those matters. It will not be possible at this time to deal with some of the questions raised this morning because, ultimately, those questions will be dealt with in the Speaker's ruling on those questions of privilege. I would urge all members to wait until the Speaker delivers that ruling.

If the hon. member for Yukon has something he feels he needs to add, I will take a comment on the point of order now.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary said that PCO was photocopying the documents. How many are being made available to the opposition parties, my party in particular?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, in response to my hon. colleague's question, I mentioned this a little earlier in one of my previous interventions. We are making sufficient copies for all opposition parties. As far as the timeline, all I can say is we are getting them produced as quickly as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It seems to me that each of the parties has had an opportunity to put their views and their positions on this matter on the record.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Colombia and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the motion that this question be now put.

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Quite some time ago, when we left the regular debate on Bill C-2, the hon. member for Welland had just completed his speech. At this point, I would ask if there are any questions or comments for the hon. member for Welland.

I recognize the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for the Bloc and the member for Welland talked about getting behind the real reasons for this trade deal because we know Colombia does not provide a big market for Canada. There must be other reasons why this agreement is being pushed to the fore. The suspicion is, of course, that it has to do more with mining companies and big business interests than anything else.

As the member mentioned, not only is the EU withdrawing support from its deal but Britain has cut off military aid agreements to Colombia. In addition to that, congressional leaders in the U.S. have as recently as a month ago indicated to us that there is absolutely no chance that this agreement would pass Congress.

Since the Conservative government always wants to follow the United States, why is it trying to lead in this case?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: My hon. colleague is right, Mr. Speaker. There is a certain group that believes there is an upside for them and that is truly the mining companies. They are in Colombia at the moment. We have heard a great deal of debate around how well they are doing. A private member's bill talks about a code of conduct for mining companies. It seeks to have them do abroad what they do at home, especially Canadian companies. I agree that their conduct should be the same in both places. Everyone should be treated the same.

As my hon. friend from Elmwood—Transcona said, it is quite interesting to note the number of countries around the world that have put up their hands and said not right now when it comes to free trade with Colombia. These countries are going to take a step back and rethink this. In the meantime, they have asked the Colombian government to basically find a way to sustain itself within its own house when it comes to workers' rights, the protection of indigenous people, the human rights of its population, its narco-trade with narco-gangs, and the paramilitary. When it does this and Colombians, as workers, ask us if we wish to enter into a fair trade agreement, then we ought to do that.

● (1200)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Welland has done a lot of fine work in terms of the importance of the agricultural industry to Canada. Given that a lot of his work has been focused on the way in which the Conservative government has not stood up for the agricultural industry in Canada, I would like him to comment on some of the hypocrisy that we have been hearing.

The government is asking us to support this agreement because it is good for Canada's agricultural industry and livestock industry, but it ignores the call for support from that industry on the ground. It attacks the Canadian Wheat Board. It attacks the Canadian Grain Commission. I would like to hear his thoughts in that area.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, that is a great question and I know the member is doing great work on behalf of her constituents.

Clearly, when we look at the agricultural sector across this country, we see a business operation, a business model, that has the highest rate of bankruptcies of any business in this country. It is quite literally falling out from underneath folks who have been in the business of agriculture for generations in some cases.

The family farm, as we once knew it, has almost been eradicated across this land. That happens due to all kinds of things. One is the void of good policy that will help the agricultural folks in this country actually survive. However, what we see is a crippling of them when it comes to prices.

What has been held out as a policy from the government is: "We will get another free trade deal that takes us into another market, and that will help". What we have seen in the agricultural sector is that as markets open up, the price for commodities goes down in a lot of cases and producers are actually poorer for that.

More markets does not necessarily enhance the agricultural sector in this country. Ultimately, what we need to be talking about is what the agricultural sector looks like in Colombia and here, and how they can be linked. There are things that we grow in this country that Colombia does not grow and wants to purchase.

However, to allow multinational agri-business into Colombia to drive campesinos off the land and destroy the family farm in the way that we have done here is not a model for prosperity in Colombia nor is it a model for agricultural workers in this country. Owners of family farms across this land who need help from the government, and need that help now, do not need to have more impediments put in their place. An open market in some places, wherever it is, including Colombia, that is not helpful to both sides in the agriculture sector is not a good deal for either one.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Madam Speaker, in 2008 the House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade passed a recommendation that the human rights impact study be undertaken to determine the real impact of a trade agreement, which the government has totally ignored.

Curiously, at that time the Liberals were in favour of this impact study under their former critic. Then they had a change in leaders, and the new critic, the member for Kings—Hants took over. Now we see a virtual marriage on this issue between the Liberal Party and the Conservatives. They are working in lockstep. We see no speakers from the government or from the Liberal Party speaking to this bill at all. They are joined as one.

Could the member explain why this has developed?

● (1205)

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Madam Speaker, the member's question is a very important one.

Clearly, what we see is the government and Her Majesty's opposition in lockstep when it comes to free trade. This from a group that at one point, as the member correctly said, was in full favour of the international trade committee looking at the human rights abuses in Colombia.

Government Orders

I know that to be true because I have had the great occasion to actually sit at that committee, not only to substitute but to attend on most occasions. I have actually witnessed the fact that members of the Liberal Party are no longer in that position, which I think is really a sense of how they believe in free trade first and clearly they are putting human rights second, which is really unfortunate.

At one point in time, the Liberals actually said human rights first and free trade second. It seems that what they have done is they have decided, as my hon. colleague has said, to marry their position with the Conservative government.

Now, when it comes to international trade, we see there is no difference between the government and Her Majesty's loyal opposition. They are indeed united as one. They are the same when it comes to trade deals. There is no different viewpoint. They are both free traders. They both say the deal is okay, we should go ahead and sign it, and we should get on with it.

They have not raised a hand in opposition to it. They continue to say that it is okay. That, from my perspective, and I know from the New Democrats perspective and from the Bloc perspective, on the committee is unsettling to say the least. What it really tells us is that they will put profits before people. That is really shameful.

What it should be about, what we should all be about, is not only representing our constituents, not only representing Canadians from coast to coast to coast, but indeed when we enter into agreements with whomever around this world, we should respect them and want them to have the things that we have as they want for us. They want us to have that shared responsibility, and that sharing and caring that we talk about.

I would look to the Liberals and say that they should respect the decision that they had before, when it comes to human rights in Colombia. Let us have the investigation first and say no to this free trade agreement with Colombia.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, we would rather not be resuming this debate on Colombia. I think the only good thing that came out of the prorogation is that this bill died on the order paper. If memory serves me correctly, this bill at the time was Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia.

The Bloc Québécois is still somewhat surprised—and so are many Canadians and Quebecers—to see the Conservative government's determination to negotiate a free trade agreement with Colombia, a country with which we have relatively little trade. There are other countries, other communities, the European Union for example, where Canada would do equally well to negotiate a free trade agreement or a partnership agreement, as it is doing with the European Union.

Knowing what little interest the government showed for years in opening negotiations between Canada and the European Union, we are surprised to see how determined this very same government is to implement this free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia.

The first reason why the Bloc Québécois cannot support this free trade agreement is the clauses on investment protection. It is rather

surprising that, in the case of the free trade agreement we just concluded with the European Free Trade Association, which the Bloc Québécois supported, we were able to get a clause on investment protection for Canada and the member countries of the association. That clause comes from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and is traditionally found in this type of trade agreement. It ensures that in the event of a dispute between investors, whether from Canada or one of the member countries of the association, the countries negotiate the settlement and make their representations to the relevant tribunals. It is not the companies that do so directly.

I remind you that we are not opposed to opening borders—we have supported a number of free trade agreements in the House beginning with the North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA—but to these clauses. They make it so that it is not the governments that are making representations, but the companies themselves, which can go directly before the special tribunals to contest the decision of a government to establish industrial or social policies or make other choices intended to improve the welfare of its citizens.

I also note in passing that only recently, pursuant to the softwood lumber agreement with the United States, it was not the American company that took the Government of Canada before the London tribunal. It was the government of the United States, which contested a decision taken by the Government of Quebec, in this case, and it was the Government of Canada's lawyers who represented the interests of the Canadian companies before the tribunal.

NAFTA was the first free trade agreement signed by developed and industrialized countries, Canada and the United States, and a developing country, Mexico. There is some paternalistic distrust on the part of the industrialized countries, because they fear that the governments of developing countries will adopt policies that could have negative consequences, in Mexico, on Canadian or American companies and investments. NAFTA provided, for the first time, these new kinds of investment protections. Under NAFTA's chapter 11 a company may go directly before a special tribunal to challenge a government's economic, social or other policies.

We cannot accept that, especially in the case of countries such as Colombia or Costa Rica. We also opposed a free trade agreement with Costa Rica.

• (1210)

There is no balance of power between these countries and an industrialized country such as ours. Governments like that of Canada or the multinationals are continually imposing rules on them.

For this reason alone, the free trade agreement with Colombia is unacceptable in our opinion. The Bloc works very hard to ensure there are no abuses in the case of NAFTA's chapter 11. Up to now, we have been able to prevent them, but the threat will remain that an American company will contest a decision of the Government of Canada. It would be surprising to have a Mexican company do so.

Government Orders

UPS already started proceedings against Canada Post because it felt it was facing unfair competition from the Purolator branch of Canada Post. Fortunately, that hit a dead end. Multinationals want to use this sort of clause for purposes contrary to the common good.

There is already good reason to oppose the free trade agreement but there are even better reasons: human rights and trade union rights in Colombia. The government can prevaricate all it wants but the reality remains. There are constant violations in Colombia of human rights, union rights and the rights of citizens, especially aboriginals.

I will provide a few figures. The U.S. State Department and Amnesty International say that another 305,000 people were displaced in 2007. In 2008, more than 380,000 people had to flee their homes or workplaces because of the violence.

According to the Human Rights Council, there was a 25% increase in the number of population displacements in 2008. The same organization says that 2008 was the worst year since 2002 for population displacements. Since 1985, nearly 4.6 million people have been forced to leave their homes or their land. The number of displaced people is estimated to be more than 3% of the entire population. Every day, 49 new families arrive in Bogota.

Aboriginals are especially targeted. They account for about 4% of the population but about 8% of the displaced persons. Colombia is actually the second worst country, after Sudan, for the number of people who have been displaced as a result of threats, reprisals and violence.

Would the Canadian government consider negotiating a free trade agreement with Sudan? It would be extremely risky politically and harmful to our international image. So it is very unlikely. The same kind of situation exists in Colombia.

Canada already only goes through the motions of denouncing the situation in Colombia. The danger of a free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia is that we would simply abdicate our international responsibilities and, even worse, subcontract immigration cases to the Colombian authorities.

I would like to take this opportunity to speak about a family that lives in my riding and reflects the situation in Colombia. A citizen and his wife had to leave Colombia because they were threatened both by FARC and the government. After quite a saga, they managed to come to Canada, where they both got refugee status.

Thirteen other members of their family are still in Colombia and witnessed the massacre of the Turbay Cote family by a former Colombian parliamentarian, Luis Fernando Almario Rojas. The family that witnessed the former parliamentarian's massacre of another parliamentarian's family is currently under the protection of the Colombian police.

•(1215)

Anyone familiar with the situation in Colombia knows that the existence of paramilitary forces and the protection of the Colombian police or of a specialized police force meant to protect witnesses involved in such cases can provide little in the way of guarantees. That kind of protection is cause for much concern because, as we all know, corruption is not unlikely, and law enforcement personnel can easily be bought.

The members of these two families, my constituent's family and his wife's, have been threatened. They went to the Canadian embassy in Bogota to ask for refugee status, but their claim was denied.

Like so many others, they went to Bogota because they wanted to get away from the people who were threatening to persecute them. They were from Caquetá. The Canadian government says right on its website that, because of political instability in certain regions, including their region, Canadians and Quebeckers are advised against travelling there. Something just does not make sense here.

I am going to read the warning because we should all be aware of the Government of Canada's own assessment of the situation in these parts of Colombia.

The presence of armed drug traffickers, guerrilla and paramilitary organizations, including the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN (National Liberation Army), poses a major risk to travellers. These groups continue to perpetrate attacks, extortion, kidnappings, car bombings, and damage to infrastructure in these areas. Landmines are used by guerrilla groups, especially in rural areas.

You are also advised against all travel to the departments of Cauca, Caquetá [the department that the citizen I mentioned, my constituent, is from], Guaviare, Valle del Cauca (excluding Cali) and Antioquia (excluding Medellín), to the southern parts of Meta department and to the city of Buenaventura, due to the presence of similar armed groups.

That is right on the government's website. How can the government warn citizens of Canada and Quebec not to visit these regions because they are full of paramilitaries, guerrillas and criminals, yet be so insensitive to what these two families are going through?

The worst part of the story, and the part that brings us back to the free trade agreement, is that the excuse given by the government's representative, the immigration officer in Bogota, was that since they are protected by the Colombian police, they have nothing to worry about. However, we know that many people in the paramilitary forces came from the police and have direct contact with most members of the Colombian Congress.

It could be said that the government has contracted out the security these people need—through an immigration officer—instead of shouldering its international responsibilities and allowing these 13 people to rejoin their brother, son, and uncle in Quebec, in Canada, in beautiful Joliette. They would undoubtedly be safer under the watchful eye of the member for Joliette. None of the Colombian refugees here in our region are afraid. But that is not what happened. Instead, Canada's responsibilities were sub-contracted to an immigration officer and, ultimately, to the Colombian authorities.

And that is what is happening without a free trade agreement. Imagine what the situation would be like if there were a free trade agreement. This tendency to avoid seeing a realistic picture of Colombia would be even worse and even more Colombians who are in danger in their country would be rejected under false pretences.

Government Orders

• (1220)

This is not a unique case, but it is a case I will follow through on. I cannot accept an agreement that is strictly for trade reasons, for investment reasons and for protecting Canadian investors, particularly a few unsavoury Canadian mining companies. I am not in any way suggesting that is the case with the whole industry, but we must be aware of what is going on in many countries. This situation is not acceptable right now, and it could get worse with a free trade agreement that will, in a way, legitimize the Colombian authorities.

The government's reply is that there are two parallel agreements being discussed here: one on labour rights and human rights, and the other on the environment. That is interesting, because it means that what the government is currently negotiating with Colombia has nothing to do with human rights and is strictly commercial.

Having two parallel agreements that provide nothing—we can be sure of that—but that affect areas that have nothing to do with trade or even protecting investment shows that the Canadian government knows this agreement has a much broader scope than a simple trade agreement.

I remind the House that these parallel agreements first appeared in the negotiations for the North American Free Trade Agreement. That was rather interesting. I was not part of the negotiations, but I was part of the North American Forum on Integration, a coalition that was following these negotiations very closely. At the time, we had a Conservative government. Its leader, Brian Mulroney, was a Progressive Conservative, but the approach was the same. We were told that NAFTA would not affect the environment or rights, and that it was strictly a commercial agreement.

Unfortunately for the Canadian and Mexican governments, Bill Clinton's election in 1993 and inauguration in 1994 completely changed things. Bill Clinton was elected by claiming that the North American Free Trade Agreement would be enhanced by agreements on the environment, union rights and labour rights. Paradoxically, it was the American government that forced the Canadian government to negotiate these agreements. I remember that the government scrambled to bring us to Ottawa to give them an idea of what an agreement on labour or the environment was. In fact, I believe Montreal is the headquarters of the environmental secretariat.

We made recommendations that were not implemented because these agreements have no teeth and are not binding in the least. We have the proof—we have been living with NAFTA and its side agreements since 1994—that these produce absolutely nothing. Furthermore, the many reports by the two secretariats indicate that there has been no progress, and that the situation has even deteriorated sometimes in Canada, the United States or Mexico. Once again, we should not see this as a paternalistic attitude. Canada and the United States have taken steps backwards in many areas in recent years. I am thinking of union accreditation in the United States and even in much of Canada.

We need agreements that are an integral part of the trade agreement. I would go so far as to say that they must be a condition for obtaining the privileges set out in the free trade agreements or partnership agreements, as they are now called by Europeans. Compliance with international conventions on the environment and

the major conventions of the International Labour Organization must be included.

That is the direction being taken. The Conservative government of Canada does not understand this. In the United States, President Obama is talking about a second generation of free trade agreements that will include these aspects. That is one reason why the ratification of the free trade agreement is currently blocked in the U.S. Congress.

Compliance with major international conventions can take many forms. It is not a question of imposing a model on developing countries.

In closing, I will give the example of union accreditation. In industrialized countries, democratic countries, there are countless means of accreditation. The practice differs completely from France to Canada to the United States.

• (1225)

However, in each country, some pressure is put to uphold the right to unionize. It is not always effective, but it does at least exist.

For example, in terms of union rights, it is important to respect the right of association. I do not believe that a free trade agreement will move Colombia in that direction.

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, as we all know, Colombia is among some of the world's worst offenders when it comes to respecting the human rights of social activists and trade unionists. In fact, I note that the vice-chair of an expert committee of the Belgian Christian trade union federation said that in the nine years he has been vice-chair of that committee on the application of ILO rules and recommendations, the only countries he has seen that are comparable to Colombia in terms of ILO violations are Myanmar and Byelorussia.

I am wondering if the hon. member would comment on the relationship between lack of respect for trade union rights and the extrajudicial killings of trade unionists in the country and trade deals.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question. The point he raised is extremely important.

Some in business and political circles believe that free trade will automatically improve rights and democracy, but there is no way to verify that. Therefore, before opening markets, it is essential to ensure that Colombia, in this case, really has the political will to solve the problem. That is why there needs to be, in the agreement, a firm commitment to indicate that union rights will be respected.

Let me say again that the term union rights here means fundamental rights. It does not necessarily have to do with bargaining and certification. There are in this world as many types of union accreditation and as many types of bargaining as one can imagine. However, we must ensure total respect for the right to organize and bargain.

Government Orders

Again, that does not mean that it will be perfect, but a firm commitment from the parties is necessary and must be included in the agreement. The same thing goes for environmental rights, which are just as fundamental as union rights.

• (1230)

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I too want to congratulate the member for Joliette. He made a most interesting speech and gave us tangible proof of what he said with the story of a couple from his riding.

This bilateral free trade agreement should, in principle, be beneficial to both countries. We know that Canada will draw very few benefits from this agreement, and yet, Canada keeps bringing it back, insisting that we pass it.

Can the member for Joliette tell me why Canada is so eager to enter into this agreement?

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Terrebonne—Blainville for her question, because it opens an opportunity to give the Canadian government an alternative with respect to opening the borders to trade.

As I said earlier, the Bloc Québécois supports that kind of openness. It does approve any forms of protectionism that are extremely damaging to the economies of nations and the international economy.

It is quite clear, however, that this free trade agreement with Colombia is a legacy from the Bush administration in the United States, and the Conservative government, which was George W. Bush's lapdog, is caught up in something it cannot get out of. It started something and now it cannot stop it, although in the United States it has been blocked in Congress until there are firm commitments regarding human rights.

Second, this follows the failure of the Doha round of negotiations. The industrialized countries tried to impose their agenda on the developing countries, particularly the emerging ones like China, India and Brazil. Those countries, with the support all of the African countries, did not accept our way of looking at development, since the industrialized countries would have been the only ones to benefit from it. In fact, we saw this in the previous round of negotiations.

Those countries wanted to find another way of negotiating other issues. Obviously, the developed countries, particularly the United States, but it is also true of Canada and Europe, overruled them. As a result, the strategy is now to negotiate bilateral agreements with the weakest countries.

Take the example of negotiations with Costa Rica. I have no idea what makes Costa Rica a major economic partner for Canada. Free trade agreements are being proposed with these extremely vulnerable countries, and this is a way of trying to surround the most promising countries for Canadian or American investors. It is a strategy put in place by the Americans. In fact, this strategy reminds me that Mao Zedong had exactly the same approach: he said that you had to use the countryside to surround the cities. That is what the Americans and Canadians are doing to the developing countries.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Madam Speaker, we have heard a lot from the Bloc Québécois and the NDP about Colombians' human rights and how this agreement would enable

the paramilitaries and some Colombians who support their government to maintain the attitude they have adopted.

One of the attacks on human rights we do not hear a lot about is the attack on women. The government says it is important to end trafficking in women. In reality, Colombia is one of the worst countries when it comes to trafficking in women, because women, particularly indigenous or Afro-Colombian women, are vulnerable and come from communities that have been displaced because of development by mining companies or agricultural multinationals. Those women are therefore in a position of heightened vulnerability.

Once again, we see the hypocrisy of this government, which wants to support an economic system that will continue this kind of exploitation, this trafficking. The Bloc has often been taken to task for some of its philosophies in this regard. I would like to know the member's opinion on this subject.

• (1235)

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question, which complements my remarks perfectly.

These are indeed the most vulnerable groups. In Colombia, there are massive displacements involving aboriginal women. The ratification of a free trade agreement will further protect unscrupulous Canadian investors who may be doing business in that country. I do not want to paint everybody with the same brush, but we know there are some because complaints have been filed by humanitarian organizations.

In Colombia, certain cases involving Canadian companies were reported in the newspapers. This is not good for Canada's image and it is not good for Quebec's image. The Bloc wants Canada to be in good shape when we are going to leave it. We want to make sure that things are done properly and that there are laws in place to prohibit and prevent this human trafficking that we are condemning loud and clear.

In fact, this is why, in the coming weeks, the hon. member for Ahuntsic will introduce a bill that will truly target human trafficking. We are not going to do like the Conservative government, which proposes legislation just for show, just to look tough, when in fact the whole exercise is just an illusion, hot air and a smokescreen. But perhaps there is a connection between this smokescreen and powder in Colombia.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): There are only 55 seconds left for a very brief question from the hon. member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Madam Speaker, earlier, the hon. member for Joliette said that the Conservative government looks like a lapdog compared to the U. S. government, as regards the free trade agreement with Colombia. I would like to remind him that, yesterday, the lapdog produced another little lapdog. Indeed, the Liberals are going to support the Conservatives to ensure that this free trade agreement goes through. I wonder if my colleague could give us his thoughts on this new position by the lapdog's offspring?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Joliette has 15 seconds to respond.

Government Orders

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Madam Speaker, in 15 seconds I will say that I am extremely disappointed to see the Liberals turn into quislings.

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, we rise at second reading to debate among all parliamentarians a bill that deals with free trade. At second reading, parliamentarians are charged with the responsibility of debating the principle of the bill that has been put before them.

I believe all members in the House could support describing the principle of the bill before the House as one that engages fundamental principles of sound trade policy. That is what underpins this bill. When we look at the issue of sound trade policy, we ask ourselves what that means. What do Canadians want to be the underpinnings of Canadian trade policy? I would submit for all parliamentarians the three principles of sound trade policy are sound economic principles, sound environmental principles and sound social and ethical principles.

I would submit that all three of those principles have to be satisfied in any particular trade proposition put before the House if we truly are going to pursue a path of sound trade policy. I do not mean one of the three principles. I mean that all three of those principles must be satisfied. Let us consider each.

Let us consider the principle of sound economic benefits. If a trade bill put before the House does not reveal that it would be beneficial for the citizens of Canada and the citizens of the country that is the target of the trade deal, then that criterion is not satisfied and the bill ought to be rejected. If that bill before the House does not contain aspects to promote and sustain environmental practices that we all know are necessary for the world to adopt, but instead leads to environmental degradation, then that criterion is not satisfied either. Finally, if that bill raises serious social and ethical questions about violations of human rights and basic social rights, or if it contains measures that may exacerbate social inequality in either country, then that criterion is not satisfied either.

Why should we have those three criteria about sound trade policy applied in the House? Because trade is an instrument of policy. With our trade policy, we can influence. We can encourage nations. We can discourage and dissuade nations through the result of decisions made in this chamber. I do not say that our trade policy is determinative. We will not fix every problem in the world through our trade policy. However, our trade policy is a reflection of what Canada can do on the world stage as we take a position that might help make the world a better place in certain corners, or a worse place.

We can reward countries that are demonstrating positive behaviour. We can discourage those nations that are violating human rights, damaging the environment and exacerbating inequality. That is because, in my respectful submission, trade is not amoral.

Would Canadians want us to trade with South Africa if the system of apartheid were still in place? Would Canadians want us to trade with Rwanda if the genocidal regime were still in power? Would Canadians want us to trade with fascist Germany, if that type of regime was on earth today? They would say no. They would not want to engage, reward or give succour to those countries if those

countries were pursuing policies that are dangerous, damaging and cause death.

Trade on the international stage ought to be, should be and must be a reflection of Canadian values. Canadians want our country to be a positive force on the world stage.

● (1240)

The New Democrats have always made those principles the cornerstone of our own policy on trade. The NDP would push for progressive, fair trade agreements that fulfill the following requirements: the agreement must promote human rights; it must be a win-win on jobs and raise the quality of jobs in both nations; it must raise Canadian standards of living and standards of living with the recipient country; it must respect and enhance environmental stewardship; and it must preserve Canada's ability to legislate and protect our sovereign areas vital to our own interests.

I studied the bill quite carefully in the last session and this session and I can tell the House that there is no doubt whatsoever that the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, as it is presently written, is contrary to all of the principles I have just enunciated, it clearly fails the human rights test and has only a marginal positive economic impact on Canada to boot.

Let us look at Colombia. It is one of the world's worst human rights violators. It is a renowned narco-state. A Canadian who does not know anything about South American politics will easily tell us that they recognize that Colombia is a major source of harmful drugs coming into our country.

It is a country with out of control paramilitary death squads and a country of gross inequality. Those are not just my conclusions. Those are the conclusions of a wide and disparate group of very respected international bodies. I will quote from a few. Amnesty International and the Canadian Council for International Co-operation have expressed deep concern that the free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia has been signed without regard for the widespread and serious human rights violations that continue to be the daily reality in Colombia. They say that there is an ongoing and extensive link between state security forces and paramilitary death squads which continue to operate despite government claims to have successfully demobilized them.

There is an ongoing failure to bring the perpetrators of human rights violations to justice despite several high profile prosecutions. Justice remains the exception and impunity the norm, giving the green light to those who continue to abuse human rights.

This is not just last year's reality or the reality of the year before. It is carrying on this year as well. Most recently, these same groups have concluded that there continues to be the use of excessive force by state security against the mobilization of indigenous people expressing opposition to free trade agreements and other policies that they believe negatively impact their rights. There continue to be threats and attacks against land rights activists, particularly in areas of economic interest impacted by this agreement.

In 2008 alone, there were threats and attacks on trade unionists that increased by 16% and more than 40 people were killed last year alone in Colombia.

Government Orders

There has been an increase in extrajudicial executions by state security forces of civilians and there have been repeated public statements by President Uribe and other senior officials demonizing trade unions such as striking sugar workers, indigenous organizations and other groups that are speaking out about violations of human rights. Such statements have led to threats and violence, including killings.

Following critical reports by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch in October, President Uribe publicly accused Amnesty International of fanaticism and dogmatism and the Americas Director of Human Rights Watch of being a “supporter and an accomplice of FARC guerrillas.

President Uribe also has demonized members of his own supreme court who were investigating links between politicians and the ruling coalition and paramilitaries.

The United Nations High Commission on Human Rights issued a press release in March calling on Colombian state authorities to guarantee the protection of human rights defenders and leaders of grassroots social organizations. It also urged Colombia's office of the attorney general to promptly begin an investigation into these events.

According to the Canadian Labour Congress, there are more labour activists and labour leaders murdered in Colombia than in all other countries on the planet put together. Colombia has 4 million internal refugees. This is a snapshot and a picture of the country with which we propose by the bill to engage in closer economic ties.

• (1245)

I want to talk a bit about equity. I did some research on the domestic situation in Colombia and two stark figures jumped out at me. The first is that 49.2% of Colombians live below the poverty line. Second, in terms of splitting up the population and their share of the wealth of Colombia and household income, the lowest 10% of people in Colombia have less than 1% of the nation's wealth, and the highest 10% of the Colombian population controls or owns 45% of that country's wealth. We are talking about a country where there is gross disparity between the wealthy and the poor and yet we want to reward that country by engaging and giving it the benefits of increased economic relations with Canada.

I find it interesting that when the government prorogued Parliament, it claimed that it did it, supposedly, to recalibrate the agenda, to consult with Canadians and to focus on the economy. When the House came back in early March, what was the first piece of legislation that it put before this House on any substantive issue? It could have been on any topic but it chose to introduce Bill C-2 on Canada-Colombia trade, a controversial and divisive piece of legislation and a rehash, by the way, of old legislation that was introduced in the last session.

I reiterate that the government could have introduced legislation on any topic it wanted. It said that it had consulted with Canadians. If so, it could have introduced a bill on jobs. Jobs are a priority for my constituents. We have a need for a national industrial strategy. We have a need for a green energy, green economic strategy. We need to create jobs in this country to help the working-class and middle-class take care of their families. We need to protect the

environment and position our country to prosper in the global economy. Did the government bring in a bill on that? No.

It could have brought in a bill on housing. We have a need for a national housing strategy. My colleague from Vancouver East has put forward an excellent bill on this very subject that the government could simply adopt. The federal government could re-enter the affordable housing business. It could help create seniors' housing, housing for the disabled, co-ops, affordable rental stock and affordable market housing. It could have brought in a bill that would have housed millions of Canadians, which is also a priority in my riding of Vancouver Kingsway. Did it do that? No. It brought in a bill to increase economic relations with a murderous regime in South America.

Did it bring in a bill on child care? A national child care program is long overdue. My colleague from Trinity—Spadina has done excellent work in this regard. Many ideas have been proposed that the government could have adopted that would help working families, women and parents across this land. They would have helped to put Canadians back to work, because when we have quality, affordable child care spots, parents are free to go back to work. No, that was not a priority for the government.

The government could have brought in a bill on pensions. In the last session, the House adopted our motion unanimously in this House. We need to improve pensions for Canadians, strengthen the Canada pension plan, increase GIS and OAS, and lift seniors out of poverty. One year of the government's spending on corporate tax cuts would be more than enough to lift every senior currently living in poverty out of that condition. What did the government do? The Minister of Finance just announced that we will engage in consultations on pensions.

We get action on engaging in economic activity with countries that are killing their citizens, but we get consultations on lifting pensioners out of poverty. We do not need consultation in this country. This House has unanimously adopted a New Democrat plan that we put forward and that is what we expect a responsible government to do.

When the government prorogued Parliament and it went out to consult with Canadians and recalibrate, did it consult with Canadians about the advisability of signing trade deals with human rights abusers? Did it go to Canadians and ask them if they wanted to have a trade deal with Colombia? Did it ask Canadians how they felt about 40 trade unionists being killed last year? Did it ask Canadians if they wanted to get a little closer with those people? I do not think it did.

Government Orders

● (1250)

I want to stop for a minute to illustrate how we feel on this side of the House about this matter: Ken Georgetti, Buzz Hargrove, Robert Bouvier, Ken Lewenza, Sid Ryan, Paul Moist, Leo Gerard, Judy Darcy, Hassan Yusuf, Leah Casselman, Tom Dufresne, Jim Sinclair, Debra McPherson, Ed Frenette, Phil Benson, Darryl Walker, Wayne Fraser, Bob White, Wayne Peppard, Barbara Byers, Marie Clarke Walker, Denis Lemelin, Lorene Oikawa, Don MacLeod, Steve Hunt, Reid Johnson, Gary Kroeker, Irene Lanzinger, Andy Ross, Barry O'Neill, Amber Hockin, Kay Sinclair Kevin, Phil Venoit, Kevin Rebeck, Don McGill, Susan Spratt, Jim Pearson, Ivan Limpricht and Cindy Oliver. Let us pretend those people were murdered last year in this country by paramilitary groups. That is what happened in Colombia last year alone.

I worked for a trade union for 16 years and represented workers when they had grievances in their workplace. I sat at bargaining tables with their employers, in the private sector and the public sector. We sat cooperatively around the table and talked about each other's interests. If I had been in Colombia last year, there is a chance I would have been killed. Is that the kind of country we want to sign a free trade agreement with? How would Canadians feel if those people I just named had been murdered by roving paramilitary right-wing groups in this country and some other country in the world wanted to foster closer relations with us? How would we feel about that country and how it regards our civil rights, our human rights?

My constituents in Vancouver Kingsway know about trade and the importance of relations with other countries. Vancouver Kingsway is a multicultural riding. Citizens in my riding come from dozens of countries around the world. Many of them are involved in import and export businesses of all types. I have thousands of small businesses in my riding working with other businesses overseas. My constituents favour building strong cultural, diplomatic, economic relationships with other countries because they recognize the benefits of economic cooperation. They know that we need to share our ideas and technologies, that we need to foster economic growth in developing countries and in our own communities, that we all want and have an interest in alleviating poverty, and that we want to build a global community. They know that trade can and should be mutually beneficial, but trade, they also know, must be done right and it must be fair.

Trade deals must benefit citizens and trade must never trump human rights. My constituents, and I believe all Canadians, do not favour giving trade priority over human rights. Canadians do not favour dealing with countries that are regressive as opposed to progressive.

The bill before us is a bad intentioned bill and it is one that would not be consistent with those values I just spoke of. Many countries in this world are showing improvements in human rights and many countries would see a real benefit to its citizen from increased economic ties to Canada. The government should be seeking out those countries. We should be fostering closer relations with countries that build the kind of country and the kind of world that Canadians want to see in our own country and our own world.

I would encourage all parliamentarians to put aside their partisan interests, look at the facts and join with all Canadians in building a

trade policy that is consistent with the principle of peace, prosperity and respect for human rights.

● (1255)

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I do agree with one thing the hon. member said, that we will not put human rights before trade. I think all Canadians believe in that.

Last week, in lieu of the concerns that we all have as we move forward, I hosted a round table discussion with Minister Adriana Mejía Hernández to actually discuss this and give us facts.

With all due respect, the Conservative Party was there, the Liberal Party was there, the Bloc was there. I personally invited the NDP there and found it insulting that not one of them showed up to ask questions.

However, my questions are these, because we must deal with facts.

The European Union is dealing with Colombia, that is, the EU with its 27 member countries. It has pretty rigid prerequisites for trade: human rights, et cetera. Some of its members are also dealing with Spain.

In 2000, there were almost 30,000 homicides in Colombia, and now these are down by 50%. In 2002, there were almost 3,000 kidnappings, and now only 213. They talk there about how the number of union members have increased. I could go on, but I just want to point out to the member that what he is dealing with are innuendoes, not facts.

We should go there, work with these people and show them a different way, a Canadian way, and help them overcome some of these difficulties that nation is going through.

● (1300)

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, one thing that can be said about Liberal trade policy is that it changes from year to year. I was in this country in 1988, when his party opposed free trade. I was in this country in 1993, when his party, the Liberals, said it would abrogate NAFTA. Of course, when the Liberals came to power, they did not have any problem completely abrogating whatever they had said on child care and housing to get elected. They did none of what they said in those areas. Now the member is standing in the House today and saying he is in favour of free trade.

I think it is a disgrace for the Liberal Party of Canada to be standing and encouraging Canada to sign a free trade agreement with a country like Colombia. The member says the situation is improving there despite dozens of people still being murdered. Imagine if we had dozens of people being murdered in this country, or even 12. Would we say the situation is improving? There should not be one person killed in a country for standing up for his or her beliefs, for standing up for the basic human right to do something as audacious as wanting to organize co-workers in a collective way to deal with an employer. As long as one person is being killed for that purpose in any country, I say on this side that we should never reward that country with a free trade agreement.

I would urge him and his other colleagues in the Liberal Party to have the courage to vote against this bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to my NDP colleague who spoke against the free trade agreement with Colombia. Obviously I share his opinion on this and I am proud to belong to a party, in Quebec, that shows great concern for human rights, as do many civil society associations, from both Canada and Colombia, that are opposed to this agreement.

I can understand that this bill would be brought forward by a Conservative government born from the right-wing Reform Party. However, to see that the Liberal Party is willing to support this kind of bill, despite all the fine speeches it made in the past, is something that is totally beyond me and that saddens me for the future of this country when I think that the Liberal Party is currently the official opposition.

I would like to hear my colleague's opinion on this. How does he see the future of this country when the two main parties in the House seem to support this bill?

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, I think what Canadians see is what we all see in this House, that the current iteration of the Liberal Party is virtually indistinguishable from the Conservative Party, in terms of major policies. That is, of course, when we can discern what the policy of the Liberal Party is, because it often takes contrary positions. The members contradict each other day to day and year to year and it is difficult to determine what they actually believe in.

I must say that the members opposite, the government, at least have the courage of their convictions and are actually consistent with their beliefs, philosophies and principles. I give them credit for that, however much I may disagree with them from time to time. However, the Liberal Party is completely adrift.

Again, by pursuing a policy indistinguishable from that of the government on deepening and embracing trade with countries that have horrible human rights records and terrible, deep social inequality is a sad testament to where the Liberal Party is today.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have breaking news.

Just a few hours ago the Liberals floated this trial balloon of somehow letting self-monitoring take place, so that the Colombian government would monitor itself. I would just like to read the first of the press releases that seem to be coming in.

This one is entitled, "Liberals sell-out on human rights with amendment to Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement". It is by the Council of Canadians, Canada's largest citizen organization, with 100,000 members, five times more than the National Citizens Coalition the Prime Minister formerly headed.

It says the following:

A Liberal proposal that would fast-track the passage of a free trade agreement with Colombia would put Canada at odds with international allies and betrays a parliamentary commitment to perform an independent human rights impact assessment first.

A council trade campaigner adds that:

Government Orders

The Belgian government today rejected a new investment treaty with Colombia because of ongoing and often unchecked human rights violations, and spying on NGOs by the Colombian intelligence agency. Incredibly, the Liberals are ready to ignore all this by letting the Colombian government monitor its own human rights violations.

The council also states:

The Liberal proposal flip-flops on a previous commitment...that the free trade agreement should not be ratified until an independent human rights impact assessment can be carried out first.

Carleen Pickard, one of several Canadian members of the pre-election monitoring group that went down to Colombia, states that:

Canada entering into a free trade agreement with Colombia now not only sends the wrong message to Canadians and the Colombian regime, it also may make Canada and Canadian companies complicit or passive supporters of continued violence in Colombia.

I would like the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway to comment.

● (1305)

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, I just want to express the gratitude of millions of Canadians for the fine work the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster has done on this file.

There is a fundamental lack of logic in the position that we should trade with known human rights abusers because we can make things better that way. If that were the case, then we would have no principles whatsoever when determining whom we are going to trade with. We could take the worst violator of human rights in the world and believe that we should start trading with them from the mistaken logic that if we trade with them somehow it will improve things.

Another grotesque lack of logic is that we can let a country like Colombia self-monitor. Talk about letting the cat among the pigeons. One simply cannot do that.

We talk a lot in this House, and I hear a lot from the other side, about responsibility and accountability. Well, to me responsibility and accountability mean that one put one's actions before one's words, that one puts up before one shuts up.

Colombia should demonstrate to the world over an extended period of time that it respects international norms of conduct. Then and only then ought it be considered as eligible for the benefits of a free trade agreement with our country.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I just want to inform the New Democrats, who of course do not support any free trade agreement, that this agreement actually requires the Government of Canada and the Government of Colombia to both author a report that will be tabled both in their congress and our Parliament on an annual basis.

We will be able to debate that report at the trade committee and actually hear from the authors of that report there, where we can question them and also hear from NGOs, civil society representatives, the business community and labour unions on an annual basis. This actually sets a gold standard for engagement.

Will the NDP stop misrepresenting this and calling it—

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order. I must give the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway a few seconds to respond.

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, the question by the hon. member is one that continues to perpetuate an absurd lack of logic.

This deal will open up Colombian territory to foreign resource extraction. It will worsen Colombia's refugee crisis. There will be no Canadian jobs created by this agreement. It will be a benefit for corporations, not workers. It will make things worse for workers in Colombia.

The trade unions do not want it. The human rights organizations do not want it. Civil society does not want it.

I wonder why the member is pushing so hard to trade with a country that is—

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Madam Speaker, today is March 25, 2010, and the negotiations between Colombia and Canada began in 2002.

On June 7, 2007, the international trade minister at the time announced that the negotiations with Colombia and with Peru had been resumed.

On November 27, 2007, a motion was introduced to study the future agreement with Colombia, and in April 2008, we started hearing testimony in committee.

There were two years of negotiations and several months of consultations between the civil societies and representatives of the Canadian and Colombian governments.

In May 2008, our committee had the opportunity to go and visit Colombia and conduct consultations there. We were in Colombia in May 2008 when we heard that the government had finalized its negotiations and would sign the free trade agreement. However, the committee had not finished its consultations. We were in Colombia consulting people. The trip was actually much appreciated by the opposition members, who were deeply moved by it.

It seemed at the time that even the Conservatives were profoundly affected. Every time witnesses told us about human rights violations, the displacement of people and killings, especially of union activists, the Conservative members seemed touched by their cause.

We also visited a small municipality where displaced people had gone. We had an opportunity there to hear the deeply moving testimony of people who had seen their fathers or husbands killed and who had been displaced by military forces, probably FARC, paramilitary forces or guerrillas. We could not help being very moved, because these people were talking about things that had happened to them.

I thought at the time that the Conservatives and the Liberals had been touched by what they heard. Lord knows how many times the Liberals have changed leaders over a short period of time. We know now that though the leaders may change, the ideas remain the same.

Returning to the Conservative government's denial of democracy, we were in Colombia when we heard that the negotiations had ended and that the government wanted to sign the agreement. We know what ensued: prorogation, an election, prorogation and a motion to limit debate and not continue the discussions.

In actual fact, it was good that Parliament was prorogued again, because it enabled us to start the debate on Colombia all over again. We are not starting right at the beginning. Some members think seriously about these things, and their position has not changed because the situation has not really changed.

The NDP is against this free trade agreement for reasons on which the vast majority of us actually agree. The NDP tends to oppose free trade, but we do agree with the NDP about human rights, the environment and everything that could happen in Colombia.

•(1310)

I had the opportunity to meet President Uribe twice. Unfortunately, he failed to convince me that he was sincere. In Colombia, I found it hard to understand the high levels of public satisfaction with that government and its president. He was first elected in 2002. Thanks to changes made to the constitution, he managed to run a second time and get re-elected in 2006. He then tried once again to amend the constitution.

The French daily *Le Monde* wrote the following on February 27, 2010: "On Friday, February 26, Colombia's constitutional court invalidated a law passed in September and designed to organize a referendum which, if it had been approved, would have changed the constitution to allow the head of the state to run in the May 30 presidential election. This means that Alvaro Uribe, who left his mark in that country with his firm stand against FARC guerrilla forces, may not be able to run for a third mandate."

There are some who are very pleased about that. Civil society and unions are among those of course, and also those people who have been suffering for eight years. In fact, they have been suffering for longer, that is 40 years during which they were caught in a corrupted system. However, members of the international community thought there was a real will to change things, including the Conservatives, who blindly believed this to be the case. The will to change things had little to do with improving the plight of the overall population and acting as quickly as possible. The president's goal was primarily to change the constitution and get re-elected for a third time.

Let me again quote *Le Monde*: "In July 2008, his government snatched from the FARC fifteen of their most valuable hostages, including Franco-Colombian Ingrid Betancourt. That year, some observers were even talking about FARC's demise. However, guerrilla forces have been gaining ground since and remain present on half of the territory."

So, some efforts were made, but they were minimal and they only sought to project a positive image to foreign countries that, of course, President Uribe wanted to welcome to his country to engage in free trade.

Just to show the lack of seriousness of President Uribe, who said he was an angel and was doing everything he could to ensure that democracy would prevail and that violence would disappear, here is another excerpt from *Le Monde*: “The constitutional court decided to invalidate in its entirety the law under which a referendum was going to be held, said the president of the court. Before that, the judge had harsh words for this legislation which, in his opinion, seriously violated the basic principles of a democratic system. These violations included irregularities in the funding of the campaign to promote the adoption of this legislation, and also during the legislative process.”

We came back from Colombia in May of 2008.

● (1315)

We continued hearing witnesses and holding committee meetings and produced a report that does not really correspond to the position taken by the Liberal Party today. I would like to read a few of the recommendations made in that report, recommendations that the Liberal Party supported. I will not read them all, because there are a number of them, but I will read the main recommendations.

The committee recommends that the Government of Canada should not sign and implement a free trade agreement with the Government of Colombia until the Canadian government has taken into account the recommendations contained in this report, including those of the dissenting reports.

The second recommendation reads as follows:

The committee recommends that the Government of Canada maintain close ties with Colombia without signing a free trade agreement until there is confirmation that the improvements noted are maintained, including continued improvement as regards displacement, labour law and accountability for crime, and until the Colombian government shows a more constructive attitude to human rights groups in the country.

And the third recommendation states:

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

Clearly, what the committee recommended was not signing this agreement as long as there were no policies in place and no ongoing improvements in terms of human rights, labour rights, the environment and impunity, and until there was an end to violence and murders of trade unionists.

Yesterday we learned that the Liberal Party was going to assess the situation and that it might support us, but that assessment will take place on March 31 each year. How can we accept a government's claims that everything that is happening in Colombia will automatically work itself out as soon as we begin trading with them and have a free trade agreement? That is impossible.

The government should have used that to—I would not say impose, because Colombia remains a sovereign state—ensure that Colombia improves the situation for its citizens, maintains this improvement and demonstrates it.

The Conservative government has a plan for South America. At one point, it held negotiations with groups, but there is now a plan to move step by step, country by country, without no other thought than to take advantage of the situation.

Government Orders

I always come back to this, and it is pretty much my pet subject when I talk about free trade and globalization. On the subject of globalization and the actions of the multinationals, which moved pretty well across the globe in a mad dash, to whose benefit or disadvantage did it all take place? This is what happens in a number of countries. They exploit the labour force and the environment and often, unfortunately, even undermine human rights. This is blatant.

Now, imagine what it would be like if we could put a human face on globalization where all these elements were included in a free trade agreement and would provide the necessary tools or even give teeth to this agreement to ensure that people respected human rights, the environment and the workers, too.

● (1320)

But that is not happening. Why show this great interest if for no other reason than to develop a piecemeal policy to enter into free trade agreements with South America?

The United States signed the agreement in 2006, but never ratified it. It was never passed in Congress because of the human rights aspect. Just before the election of Barack Obama, I travelled to Washington, where I met senators and people from Congress. They seemed to want to change their mind, but did not do so. One of the reasons Canada wants to move as quickly as possible is to get the edge on the United States and negotiate tariff reductions that are more favourable to Canada than to the United States.

Statistics on crime in Colombia paint a very grim picture. In 2008, while we discussed the free trade agreement in committee, crime committed by paramilitary groups rose by 41%. The Conservatives, however, told us that things were going well and the situation was improving. Crimes committed by the government security forces rose by 9%. Despite the increase in crime, impunity remains unchanged. Only 3% of crime ends in a conviction.

Since 1996, 2,690 trade unionists have been killed. While murders of trade unionists have declined somewhat since 2001, the murders have resumed since 2007. There were 39 murders of trade unionists in 2007 and 46 in 2008, while we were hearing witnesses in committee. The Conservative Party said the situation was improving, when it was worsening. They said trade unionists had made progress.

Colombia does not have a legal framework to govern collective bargaining. On that point, about 95% of the public sector workforce is not covered by legislation governing collective bargaining. The situation is similar in every field, but I am sensitive to what the Colombian community is experiencing. Blindly signing whatever free trade agreement is presented is not the way to help them. We need to have a genuine desire to help these people get out of this stagnant situation and treat them as equals. Conditions have to be comparable and the agreement has to help both parties.

At present, we have the impression that the Canadian government wants to exploit Colombia. Colombians have enough problems already. I hope Canada will not make things worse.

Government Orders

In the past, we could count on the Liberal Party, which had genuinely demonstrated compassion and a desire to improve the situation in Colombia before doing business with it. The Conservative government said we had to hurry up because we needed to do business, to export and import.

• (1325)

The figures show that no free trade agreement officially applies, but there has been an increase in trade with Colombia between individuals. The fact that no free trade agreement applies has not reduced transactions between the two countries. In the normal course, they increase.

Some members of the committee have changed because the party leaders changed, but I recall that the previous leader of the Liberal Party was very sensitive to this situation. I think this kind of agreement would not have been accepted. The environmental aspect was important to him, and it still is.

There is also the human rights aspect. It is inconceivable that we would sign a free trade agreement without making sure that effective policies have been implemented. We must not act like Uribe and blow smoke in our eyes for a brief instant. It is known now that he will not be there any longer, so it is increasing.

• (1330)

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, we now know what the government was doing while it was recalibrating after proroguing Parliament. It was basically cooking up a deal with the Liberals to support Bill C-2. Make no mistake, this agreement could not pass in the House if it were not for the Liberals' changing sides and cooking up a deal with the government to support it.

In 2008, the Standing Committee on International Trade recommended that a human rights impact assessment be undertaken, but that was under the previous Liberal leader and the previous Liberal critic. There was a change of leader and a change of critic, and the new critic has been quoted as saying that Colombia has more robust labour rules than Canada does. I could go on. We have numerous quotes from the member.

We know that Colombian labour laws stifle workers' rights. The rate of unionization is less than 5%, the lowest of any country in the western hemisphere. It seems to me that the Liberal Party has turned completely 180° in its position on this issue in the last year.

Could the member somehow enlighten us as to what is going on with the Liberals?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin: Madam Speaker, the member is asking me to enlighten him on some of life's mysteries and on some political mysteries that are often impossible to explain.

There are flip flops. A party gets a taste of power and at some point, the tide turns. And then the tide turns again and that party is left wondering what it would do if it were in office. It thinks that it can ill afford to be against the free trade agreement because, after all, it supports free trade and trade is important. God knows how

dangerous that kind of thinking can be. I find it difficult to understand that kind of behaviour.

However, it can be explained by the fact that that party wants to return to power and has often acted a little or I should say a lot like the Conservatives. The Bloc Québécois made a lot of proposals to the Liberals when they were in office. It is strange to see that today, they support practically all of them whereas when they were in office, they rejected them categorically.

In short, life's mysteries are easier to explain than Liberal mysteries.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are debating Bill C-2, Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act at second reading. As members know, we are here hopefully to put onto the table fundamental facts, which should be driving the conservation and building up the case that, if this matter gets approval in principle at second reading and goes to committee to hear from expert witnesses, there will be a body of evidence coming from members here. Unfortunately, second reading is being used for something a little different, and that is unfortunate because I know there are many hon. members here who do have this kind of information.

Therefore, I would like to ask the member if he has anything to contribute to the understanding of the bill, whether or not he has any evidence that other jurisdictions that were discussing trade relationships with Colombia have had second thoughts or there has been emerging information that there is some reluctance now, and whether or not there are jurisdictions, in fact, that have announced they will not be proceeding at this time, notwithstanding what leaders of countries said. These are important factors the House should be aware of, and we should use this time wisely. I ask the member for his comments.

• (1335)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin: To ask the question is to answer it, Madam Speaker.

By shying away from signing this free trade agreement on the basis of human rights, the United States are acting somewhat contrary to their nature. Some European countries have also done so while we were considering this proposed agreement. I encourage the hon. member and those who might not be aware of what transpired to read the report of the Standing Committee on International Trade and its recommendations. I am tempted to say that the recommendations received 100% support from the Liberals, but I could be mistaken, so I will say 99% support. I want to give them some leeway, because I am really not that mean.

I urge all members of this House to read this document carefully and, then, talk to their colleagues who came with me to Colombia and ask them what they saw there. The people with whom we met did not have any direct interests like mining companies or businesspeople in other sectors do. These were people who experienced oppression, violence and reprisals. It could go as far as murder, depending on what stand they took in that society.

Government Orders

In my riding, we have many people who came from Colombia. Sherbrooke is home to many immigrants. In fact, I think it is one of the cities in the region with the most immigrants. We have many Colombian immigrants. Some of my constituents have experienced things similar to what the hon. member for Joliette described earlier. There are also students from Colombia who are being constantly oppressed. This is still a reality in 2010. More often than not, where does change come from? From university students with a craving for justice and freedom, who are oppressed and under constant threat.

I encourage all members of the House to read the report. Through efforts in terms of international assistance to help the various sectors of activity dig themselves out, something could surely be done and a free trade agreement could be signed with the people seeking to be free.

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask this of the hon. member who has so much experience with South America. There are countries in South America that are committed to progressive values. They are democratizing their countries. They are trying to raise the standard of living of their citizens, and they are making human rights progress. I am thinking of countries like Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and even Venezuela. I am wondering if my hon. friend would comment on why he thinks the government has chosen to sign a free trade deal with Colombia, probably the worst violator of human rights in South America, as opposed to these other countries. I am wondering if he thinks Canada's trade policy might be better directed at dealing with trade with other countries including Brazil, notably, which is one of the most powerful emerging economies in the developing world.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is not from a trade point of view that this free trade agreement is beneficial to Canada, but rather from an investment point of view. The investment agreement is the twin of chapter 11 of NAFTA. The best resource lands are those from which people were forcibly removed or for which they were simply killed.

These lands were taken without their owners' consent. The day those people decide to claim their rights with regard to those lands after they have been sold to a Canadian company, can one imagine what kind of situation this will create? Once again, the Conservative Party's main focus is to protect the financial interests of those who invest in Colombia, whatever they do.

● (1340)

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am rising to speak to this agreement, which the Bloc Québécois opposes. We could not possibly be in favour of it.

It is hard to understand why the Liberals jumped ship and say—as an hon. member did this morning—that there is less violence and fewer murders now in Colombia when our colleague tells us that 48 trade unionists were killed in 2008, which is not so long ago.

Is it because the Liberals think life is less valuable now than it used to be or that lives in Colombia are not worth much? Is that how we should take it? Or should we assume they are afraid of being

accused during the next election of opposing the agreement with Colombia?

In my view, it is probably the latter. It is still too bad, though, that they fail to see how valuable the lives of Colombians are.

We in the Bloc have always been in favour of free trade when it is with countries where the standard of living is roughly comparable to our own. That was true of NAFTA but it is not the case in the agreement with Colombia, where 77% of the people live below the poverty line and 12% in dire poverty.

This means that 17% of the people live in a certain amount of comfort and that real wealth is concentrated in the hands of 1% or 2%. This is the tiny proportion with whom the government wants to sign an agreement. A few Canadians would also like to be able to operate mines and factories without being bothered by the Government of Colombia, which might bring legislation forward that would place restrictions on their operations.

What we need to remember about this free trade agreement is that it will enable Canadians and Quebeckers who have the money to develop new mines or factories to get around potential legislation passed by Colombia.

If the Conservatives were sincere—and I will return to this point—and really wanted to see the situation in Colombia improve, they would start by providing aid and helping to reduce drug trafficking. When poverty in Colombia has been reduced, they could then sign a free trade agreement more or less between equals.

The Liberals are really feeling guilty—at least that is what I heard them saying this morning—and say they will require a report to be submitted every year in order to see whether the situation has improved. Just imagine. They sign an agreement and then they study the reports.

Once the agreement has been signed with the Government of Colombia, are they really going to change their minds and backtrack because of a report? That is nonsense. A report certainly will not change anything.

There is extreme poverty throughout Colombia.

● (1345)

It is really unfortunate and there has to be help in this regard. This country is heavily in debt, has 43 million inhabitants and has wealth concentrated in the hands of a few individuals. So it is hard to imagine respect being given to people working in difficult areas, such as mines, and human rights being upheld. It is also hard to imagine that the unions will have the power to change the government's attitude.

I would like to quickly go over conditions which prevent the country from readily adopting legislation. We are told it is for trade. Let us take a look at one thing. Colombia exports grain and beef. We have those here. That is their primary production. We are not going to trade cattle for cattle and grain for grain. Is it not really for the extraction of precious metals? I think that would be much more likely. So, it is not a trade agreement, it is an agreement to avoid legal proceedings if damage to the environment results.

Government Orders

The environment is global and important. In other words, the government does not want Colombia to pass restrictive legislation on the environment that would reduce the production of Canadians investing there. In terms of the environment, consideration must be given to potentially dangerous waste from a number of open-pit mines. Deforestation occurs as well. Trees are cut without proper replanting because the mine is open. If there were legislation requiring replanting, some would not be pleased because it would cut into their profits. Landslides are a risk as well. When open pit mines are created over vast areas, mudslides can occur in heavy rains, such as we see increasingly with climate change, which can bury villages built below the cliffs where people go to work in the mines. There are no town planning regulations, it goes without saying. The investors do not like that.

As concerns water, a number of factors may have an impact. What is taken from the mines can impact surface water, drinking water. We have seen this in mines in South America owned by Canadians. The water is so polluted that people can no longer drink it or use it for laundry. Naturally, underground water and the water table can be contaminated. It can have even more sinister effects because water some 40 or 50 kilometres away in another village can be polluted along with all the wells.

So we can see where this leads? Only the word environment and binding environment protection legislation can lead us further. The sole purpose for this free trade agreement is to save investors from having to face too many environmental constraints.

As for labour laws, the situation is the same. It means that people would be given respectable working conditions, that the unions could make demands so that it would cost investors more a few years after they set up. It is too restrictive, so they do not want to hear about it.

• (1350)

Let us talk about health laws now. Whether we are talking about open-pit mines or underground mines, in the long term, health can deteriorate when minerals this dangerous are being extracted. They prefer to let people's health deteriorate rather than allow a government to enact binding legislation.

Let us also talk about pension laws. We would have to look long and hard to see people being looked after once their career is over. The government could enact pension legislation, and the companies would then have to pay. That is among the things that would not be welcomed by companies that prefer no constraints.

Once again, this is all aimed more at protecting investments than at trade. These are not negotiations between equals. I have described the extent of the poverty in that country. It is quite obvious that we are not going to be selling General Motors cars to the population. We will sell some to a few people who are very rich, and we will sell a few commercial or utility vehicles to people on the ground to promote investment from Canada. It is quite obvious that this agreement is not about free trade with the people. Thinking that amounts to putting on a blindfold.

There is a certain hypocrisy in this kind of agreement. Obliquely, we imply we will be opening up. Yesterday afternoon, I even heard a member of cabinet say that this kind of agreement would allow

Canada to develop its foreign trade. That is not the case. Signing an agreement with Colombia is not going to develop Canada's foreign trade. Be serious! We have to have agreements with Europe. We have to have agreements with people who have money. We have developed our foreign trade with the United States because there are people there with purchasing power; and still there are ups and downs. Because of the current crisis, globalization has had some setbacks.

Other members said earlier that it was time to sign this agreement because of the current global crisis. In a global crisis, poor countries are much harder hit than wealthy countries. Let us now go and see, in Colombia, how hard the Colombians have been hit by the crisis. This is not the time to go and exploit them more, it is the time to help them. If we really wanted to help those people, we would lend them money, we would help them to get on track and develop their country, we would not be proposing to sell them things. It is entirely improbable that this is going to happen.

This kind of agreement will not produce any improvement. Globalization has not improved the situation in every country, but it has greatly improved the situation in the big countries: the United States and its satellite countries.

Let us go and see whether globalization has brought well-being to Africa. The United States sells them rice that is subsidized and grown using super-mechanized methods. In those countries rice growing has been killed off. Elsewhere, countries have killed off the garment manufacturing industry by dumping cheap clothing.

So globalization is not automatically an improvement, particularly for smaller or less wealthy countries like Colombia, whose economic equilibrium is fragile.

• (1355)

Canada is able to make products cheaply and wants to sell them those products, and this will destroy the commercial fabric of those countries, which is very fragile.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Could I ask for a little order, please. Out of respect for the member who is speaking, I ask for a little order until 2 o'clock when the speeches will be finished.

The hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: I will carry on, Madam Speaker.

At present, there is no protection for unions. In Colombia, one can kill a trade unionist and pay a fine. Does that qualify as protection of life and human rights? I think not. In that case, how can we be expected to vote for a free trade agreement with a country where we know human rights are not respected? While some Liberal members said this morning that progress had been made, the fact remains that 48 trade unionists were killed in 2008, as my colleague indicated. That is certainly 48 deaths too many. I do not think that Canada would have tolerated having 48 trade unionist murdered on its territory in 2008. That would make absolutely no sense because human rights are respected in Canada. So why do we not care about a South American country where human rights are much more severely trampled and very little progress is being made? Too little progress can be expected to be made, say within the next year, to see an agreement signed and expect that everything will be fine from then on.

The prevailing political, economic and social conditions in Colombia are deplorable, and not just because there are so many poor people. Conditions are bad because of the 17% of the population that I mentioned earlier, the people who are in government, who keep the government in power, who control commercial activity, and who thwart efforts to pass social legislation. We are not talking about a democratic government that all citizens have a say in. Most of the illiterate people do not have a chance to express themselves. One has to wonder why a government like Colombia's would even want to sign a free trade agreement with Canada. Clearly, the real reason for this agreement is investment.

If Colombia is just after investment, then, to be sure, it will not bite the hands that feed it. It will not pass restrictive laws. It is clear to me that an agreement like this one, with a poor country, is not an agreement between equals. The poor country wants an agreement that makes it easier for investors to play a leading role. This agreement is ill-conceived. It will enable the Government of Colombia to keep doing what it has been doing all along. The government will not voluntarily pass measures that could reduce returns on those investments, and this agreement will not require it to do so.

These are all reasons why we must vote against this agreement. I believe that anyone voting for this agreement will be doing so for purely electoral reasons.

• (1400)

The Speaker: When this bill comes up for debate again in the House, the hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi will have 10 minutes for questions and comments on his speech.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

MAUREEN VODREY

Mr. Ted Menzies (Macleod, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House today to congratulate senior interpreter, Maureen Vodrey, on her retirement from the House of Commons.

Maureen is the longest serving parliamentary interpreter in Canadian history, beginning her career in 1973 at a time when

Statements by Members

Pierre Trudeau was our prime minister and John Diefenbaker was still a member of this House. She has interpreted countless events, including royal visits, leadership debates and the 1982 repatriation of Canada's Constitution.

During her career, Maureen interpreted for Ed Broadbent, Jean Chrétien. She even interpreted Joe Clark's High River French, John Diefenbaker, Robert Stanfield and John Turner, just to name a few.

Her loyal service has made her a witness to history, not to mention an expert in parliamentary procedure. She has won numerous awards for her craft and has earned tremendous respect from her colleagues both on and off the Hill.

Please join me, along with her husband Robert and son Simon, in congratulating Maureen Vodrey on 37 years of outstanding service to Canada and this House.

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INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the other day during debate members of the Conservative government were outlining the infrastructure and RInC money given to their ridings. I am happy for them, but for years I have been corresponding with various ministers requesting financial assistance for the building of the first Greek Canadian cultural community centre in Toronto. My correspondence seems to have been passed from one department to the other and one minister to another. The answer is always no, no money.

Greek Canadians are proud Canadians. They too have played a role in building this great country of ours. They too pay taxes. Therefore, I ask this. Why is the Conservative government turning its back on the Green community?

A government is elected to treat its people fairly and equally, especially today, March 25, when Greek Canadians are celebrating Greek Independence Day and the Greek community of Toronto is celebrating its 100th anniversary in Canada. It seems the Conservative government does not like Greek people. What a shame.

Come election time, they will not forget.

* * *

[Translation]

UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this morning I had the chance to meet the delegates of the Pauktuutit annual general meeting. This association advocates on behalf of Inuit women, helps guide them on pursuing equality issues and encourages their participation in social and political life in their communities and in Canada.

Pauktuutit organizes activities to promote women's and children's rights, gender equality and abuse prevention. Founded in 1984 with modest means, Pauktuutit is now a respected organization that assists thousands of women.

Statements by Members

At their annual general meeting, the delegates told me about their concerns that the Conservative government had still not signed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I want to remind the government of the importance of signing this daring and promising human rights instrument.

* * *

MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I recently travelled to Ethiopia with an NGO called Results Canada.

During this trip, I learned that tuberculosis, which killed 1.8 million people in 2008, can be treated for just \$20 per person.

I also came to realize the impact that access to basic sanitation can have on the health of a child and an entire community.

I witnessed the quality of the work done by community and health workers who provide care and a clean space where a woman can safely give birth to her child.

I would like to congratulate Results Canada on its efforts and its incredible work.

However, the Conservative government has a responsibility towards the poor in this world. The government must act immediately by investing in these types of effective, low-cost interventions that save the lives of millions of women and children in this world. The mothers and children of this world cannot wait any longer.

* * *

● (1405)

[English]

CANWEST CANSPELL NATIONAL SPELLING BEE

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Canwest Canspell spelling bee participants from across Canada. This grassroots literacy initiative encourages academic excellence in grades four to eight students. Approximately 250,000 young spellers participated in the 2010 Canspell competition.

I would like to make special mention of Josh Mathews who is with us on Parliament Hill today with many of his fellow competitors. He is a grade five student from the riding of Winnipeg South and he won the *Winnipeg Free Press* regional spelling bee.

Josh and the top spellers from each regional bee received a \$5,000 Canspell Education Award. Congratulations to all them. I wish them the best of luck this week as they compete for the Canadian title.

I would also like to point out that it is Josh's 11th birthday on Monday. Happy Birthday, Josh, and good luck to everyone involved.

* * *

EPILEPSY

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, March 26, is Purple Day, a day to raise international awareness about epilepsy. I would like to encourage my colleagues to wear purple in support of this special event.

Epilepsy is one of the most common neurological disorders affecting 300,000 Canadians and 50 million people globally.

In 2008, Cassidy Megan, a young girl who lives in my riding of Halifax West, founded Purple Day to build support for people with epilepsy. I hope all of us will join Cassidy and wear purple tomorrow.

* * *

GLOBAL ADVOCACY DAYS

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today marks the 203rd anniversary of the enactment of the Slave Trade Act by the British Parliament. This historical legislation resulted in the end of the Atlantic slave trade. However, today there are more humans enslaved than any other given moment throughout history.

Over the past two days, Ottawa has played host to the Global Advocacy Days, the first conference in Canadian history to educate and equip modern abolitionists.

The Global Advocacy Days has been organized by the Not For Sale, an international movement of students, artists, people of faith and many others all united to fight the global slave trade. Yesterday, I had the honour of speaking to these great and dedicated Canadians who are fiercely committed to ending this modern day slave trade that remains a terrible mark upon our generation.

Today, I am pleased to welcome our Canadian abolitionists and Dr. David Batstone, founder of the Not For Sale Campaign on Parliament Hill.

After question period today, I invite all hon. members to Room 200 West Block, at 3:30 p.m., to meet these advocates and help end human slavery once and for all.

* * *

[Translation]

JEAN BRISSON

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a remarkable citizen from my riding is celebrating his birthday today. At 79, phenomenal personality Jean Brisson is still hosting his own daily radio program on a Rimouski station, and he still brings the same energy and outstanding passion to the job as he did when he started in 1949.

The time I have today is not nearly enough to highlight his career and his many accomplishments. As a consultant, columnist, and television, radio and telethon host, Mr. Brisson dedicated his life to his community and to the well-being of all. He took on countless challenges and became well-known through his involvement in many social and humanitarian causes. I would like to wish Mr. Brisson a very happy birthday and to congratulate him on his brilliant career.

I hope my friend has a truly wonderful day and a joyful year. He is an inspiration to us all.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's number one priority is the creation of jobs and economic growth.

I am pleased to announce that today the Prime Minister welcomed Kongsberg Defence and Aerospace's decision to create jobs and invest in Canada by opening a new manufacturing facility in London, Ontario, which is just down the road from the riding of Oxford.

The new facility is expected to directly create up to 100 jobs in the London area, with a further 500 jobs through supplier activity. These are the kinds of knowledge intensive jobs on which the highly developed economy of the future will be based.

Kongsberg's decision confirms that Canada has the right conditions to attract and nurture the new economy. Canada is open for business and will emerge from recession more powerful, more competitive and more prosperous than it ever was before.

* * *

● (1410)

NATIONAL DAY OF REFLECTION ON THE PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, two years ago the House unanimously adopted a motion designating April 7 as the National Day of Reflection on the Prevention of Genocide.

I rise today in remembrance and commemoration of the 16th anniversary of Rwandan genocide, of horrors too terrible to be believed but not too terrible to have happened, where one million Rwandans, mostly ethnic Tutsis and Hutus, were murdered in less than 100 days.

But the worst horror is not only that of the genocide itself but that this genocide was preventable. No one can say that we did not know. We knew but we did not act.

And so, as the Security Council and international community dithered and delayed, Rwandans died.

Indeed, the great tragedy is not only how many Rwandans were murdered but how so few intervened to save them, ignoring the compelling lesson of history that the Rwandan genocide occurred not simply because of the machinery of death but because of indifference in the face of incitement and atrocity.

Statements by Members

Never again.

* * *

PROJECT HERO

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Project Hero, which was started in 2009 by retired General Rick Hillier and honorary Lieutenant Colonel Kevin Reid, is a unique program which provides undergraduate scholarships to the children of fallen Canadian armed forces service men and women.

Sadly, a ragtag group of radical leftist professors at the University of Regina are opposed to Project Hero, including the leader of the pack whose research interests include Marxism and the Latin American left. The attitude of these so-called academics is shameful.

Project Hero is giving a helping hand to the children of men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of our country. Yet a bunch of comfortable academics sitting thousands of kilometres away at a university far from the fields of Afghanistan have the nerve to oppose this program.

These so-called academics should stop letting their extreme left-wing views in opposition to the conflict in Afghanistan get in the way. They should join Canadians in getting behind Project Hero.

* * *

CANWEST CANSPELL NATIONAL SPELLING BEE

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to give a 21 gun salute to 21 young scholars from across Canada. They are in Ottawa this week to participate in the Canwest Canspell National Spelling Bee. Among them, I am proud to say, is my constituent, Laura Weir, who won the *Victoria Times Colonist* regional spelling bee.

A quarter of a million middle school students participate annually in this competition. That is a quarter of a million young Canadians celebrating literacy together and setting an example.

Regional champions, like Laura, are available to help members and senators with their spelling today and they will be in Kanata to cheer on the other Senators on Saturday.

Though only one winner can compete internationally, I congratulate all the Olympian spellers. They make us p-r-o-u-d, proud.

* * *

[Translation]

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, the Liberal leader will chair a conference of leading thinkers in Montreal in an effort to reinvigorate his party and offer people a credible alternative to the Conservative government.

Of course, this is the same Liberal leader who was all set to topple the government last fall even though he had no plan of his own for governing. Six months on, he is on a mission to come up with some fabulous new ideas.

Some 250 people are expected to participate in the conference, and they will all be paying an unbelievable amount of money for the privilege of attending.

Oral Questions

The purpose of this meeting of leading thinkers is this: “The objective is not to advance simple solutions, or short-term tactics. Rather, the conference will start a national dialogue about the big issues that will determine the future well-being of Canadian families, individuals and both urban and rural communities”.

Oddly enough, the Liberal leader did not see fit to invite his own MPs.

Does he really think that ideas put forward by his—

• (1415)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord.

* * *

MAUREEN VODREY

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to pay tribute to the dean of interpreters on Parliament Hill, Mrs. Maureen Vodrey, who, after 37 years of loyal service to Parliament, is retiring.

Mrs. Vodrey began her brilliant career in the 29th Parliament. She was, among others, the voice of René Lévesque on the occasion of the unilateral patriation of the Constitution, and was in the interpreting booth during the Meech Lake negotiations. In addition to doing yeoman's service as senior interpreter on the Hill, Mrs. Vodrey also finds the time to train budding interpreters at the University of Ottawa, thereby ensuring that parliamentarians will benefit from the same outstanding language services they have received for years to come.

My colleagues from the Bloc Québécois join me in thanking you for having been the English voice of the Bloc Québécois for the past 20 years, and we wish you a long and happy retirement with your husband.

Thank you for your professionalism, Mrs. Vodrey.

* * *

MAUREEN VODREY

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to pay tribute to one of our interpreters, Mrs. Maureen Vodrey, who is retiring after 37 years of loyal service to Parliament.

Members of this House would be unable to do their work without the support of this team of competent and devoted language specialists. Maureen Vodrey is a member of this team, one of the many who work in the shadows, lending their voices so that we can better understand the content and subtleties of parliamentary debate.

Throughout her career, Mrs. Vodrey has seen a succession of governors general, speakers and clerks. During a turning point in our nation's history, she interpreted Prime Minister Trudeau, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, and René Lévesque during the patriation of the Constitution, and was present to interpret many of the Meech Lake negotiations.

I am told that parliamentary procedure is one of her passions. Her in-depth and unmatched knowledge thereof has enabled her to react promptly to the countless unforeseen and challenging situations

arising in this Chamber, and to train the next generation of young interpreters.

I invite all colleagues to join me in thanking Mrs. Vodrey and wishing her a happy retirement.

* * *

[English]

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Liberal leader prepares to convene his spenders' conference in Montreal this weekend, let us take a look at his track record.

He promised that the Liberal platform would be ready last June, and yet he tried to force an unnecessary election last fall with no platform in place; this, after coming back to Canada after being away thinking for 34 years. Now the Liberal leader is starting to think about what Liberal policies might be, but we already know.

The only thing to come out of the Liberal spenders' conference this weekend will be grandiose proposals that will require higher taxes, including a GST hike.

Canadians know that higher taxes kill jobs.

Canadians want a government focused on building jobs and growth in this country. Our economy and building our economy is exactly what we are working on. Our Conservative government is working on that every single day.

Let the Liberal leader muse from his professor's lectern during the spenders' conference. At the end of the day—

The Speaker: Order. Oral questions, questions orales. The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we learned in the press today that the government's officials have discussed with the Americans the possibility of keeping Canadian troops in Afghanistan post 2011. This government made no mention of this in any of its quarterly reports to Parliament or in any of its submissions to parliamentary committees. This is no way to run the foreign policy of a serious government.

Will someone in the government tell us what in heaven's name is going on?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, time and time again and once again reiterated in the Speech from the Throne, we have been clear in stating that Canada's military mission will end in 2011.

• (1420)

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, then the government will have to explain why this obvious trial balloon entered the press.

The United States is asking Canada to keep as many as 600 soldiers in Afghanistan after 2011. The government did not bring this before the Canadian people. This is no way to conduct foreign policy.

Will the government commit to putting any deployment in Afghanistan past 2011 to a vote in Parliament?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this supposed U.S. request, I want to reassure the Leader of the Opposition that we have not received a request of this nature.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, he did not answer my question.

The question is as follows: there are well-founded rumours about extending the military mission in Afghanistan past 2011.

Can the government assure Canadians that any extension of our mission in Afghanistan will be subject to a vote in Parliament?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will reassure the Leader of the Opposition once again: our military mission will end in 2011, as we indicated in the throne speech.

After that, Canada will continue to maintain diplomatic relations and monitor development through its embassy in Kabul, as we do in other countries.

[English]

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government appointed Mr. Iacobucci at the last minute on a Friday morning, then took two weeks to release his terms of reference, and this morning dumped some torture documents in the House without Mr. Iacobucci reviewing them.

What was the government's objective in hiring him? Was it just a stalling tactic? Why is Mr. Iacobucci being circumvented? Does he have a real job, or is this just more cover for the government?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is quite the opposite. Mr. Justice Iacobucci is going to undertake an independent comprehensive review of all the documents. The government has said that officials will make all relevant documents available and the tabling today is part of that process.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, the government dumped some torture documents in this House. They have been ready since January to be released to the House, yet there was no translation, no copies. They were in no particular order. The government has had three and a half months to provide these documents, yet its response today has been totally incoherent and totally disorderly, like chickens with their heads cut off.

When will the government provide a coherent answer to this torture scandal?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at least we know how to vote.

Oral Questions

Again, we have indicated that officials will provide all legally available documents. There is a process in place with Mr. Justice Iacobucci. I would suggest that the hon. member let Mr. Justice Iacobucci do his work.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Djemila Benhabib, the Algerian-born Quebec author who wrote *Ma vie à contre-Coran*, happened to learn that CSIS ran a credit check on her. When she asked CSIS why, it sent her a heavily censored document with, for information, paragraph and page numbers.

What is the Prime Minister waiting for to reform monitoring agencies like CSIS, as he promised he would some time ago?

Perhaps the Prime Minister does not really want to proceed with a reform since he shares the same philosophy as CSIS, in other words, a culture of censorship and secrecy at the expense of human rights.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as has been indicated many times in this House, when the redaction of documents is done, it is done at an arm's length from the government by senior public servants, in the same way that the previous Liberal government did it. I will look into this particular matter, but I can assure the member that any redaction that was done was done by senior public servants at an arm's length from the government.

• (1425)

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the security intelligence review committee website is available in English, French and Arabic.

How does the minister explain that? Is this not proof that CSIS engages in racial profiling? If not, what interest does it have in posting information in Arabic?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am certainly pleased that the CSIS information and website are in English and French. As to why the information is also in Arabic, I cannot say at this point, but I will certainly get back to the member with an answer.

* * *

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we learned that the U.S. government is about to ask, through NATO, that 500 to 600 Canadian troops be maintained in Afghanistan after July 2011. However, the Conservative government has said repeatedly that no Canadian troops would remain in Afghanistan after that date.

Oral Questions

Can the Conservative government assure us that it will not follow up on this request and that it will respect the July 2011 date for the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to point out again that our military mission will end in 2011, as agreed, as mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, and as has been repeated time and again in this House and elsewhere. It is clear: in 2011, we will no longer be there.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government refuses to give us the facts regarding the extension of the Afghan mission. It is the same thing with the heavily censored documents that it released this morning. The government pretends to be cooperating, but in fact it is hiding the truth.

Why does the government refuse to comply with the order of the House, which requires that all documents on the torture of Afghan detainees be made available to it in their full version?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has been very clear. The government has said that it will provide all legally available documents. With respect to the redactions, these are done by non-partisan public servants whose only interest is the protection of national security in this country. That should have the support of the hon. member.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning the government tabled a pile of documents that are supposed to be its response to a question of privilege that is hanging over its head.

This is an old lawyer's trick: flood the interested party with documents—in this case heavily censored—to buy time.

This is contempt for the House, for elected members and, more importantly, for Canadians.

When will the government stop playing games and comply with the House order?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with respect for the House that the documents were in fact tabled. The hon. member, his party, and others have been asking for these documents. Again, this is what was done this morning. I am surprised that the hon. member now seems to be miserable about that.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this House ordered the government to give elected members protected access to uncensored documents. Instead, we got two boxes of contempt for Parliament, for its Speaker and especially for Canadians, who have a right to know the truth about their government's behaviour.

Behind the lie that this is about national security, it is the same old story. The Conservatives are just trying to buy time to protect themselves. Tell the whole truth, respect Parliament, and allow secure access to all the documents.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the hon. member to have a look at the documents. There are 2,500 pages. He should not jump to any conclusions until he actually has them. This is not like the budget. He should read it and have a look at it before he comes to any conclusions. That is my advice to the hon. member.

• (1430)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has just given two very different answers in French and in English. In his English answer he said, "Canada's military mission will be over in 2011". In his French version he says,

[*Translation*]

"It is clear: in 2011, we will no longer be there."

[*English*]

Two very different answers. One refers to the military mission, the other is a very general statement that we are gone. Yes or no, all troops gone from Afghanistan in 2011. Yes or no?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if instead the hon. member would listen to the answers, he would know that I said "military". So, I will repeat it again. Allow me to point out to the hon. member that Canada's military mission will end in 2011.

* * *

PENSIONS

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in last year's budget, the Conservatives confirmed that the retiree issue was so important that they would hold consultations with Canadians within 90 days.

They did not respect their own deadline. More than a year later, these consultations had still not produced a concrete proposal for the provinces at the meeting in December and had produced even less for Canadians. And what did the government announce yet again? Consultations. Enough with the empty promises. The provinces want measures and Canadians are demanding answers.

When will we get a definitive answer?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance led the approach on consultations which is very important and that resulted in very important amendments that were done in October of last year. They are very important for defined benefit plans in Canada.

Now, together with the other governments in Canada, the provinces and territories, we are working on further initiatives, but remembering always that this is a joint effort in Canada. This is not just a federal effort. We must work with the provinces and territories, and I counsel the member—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are more than 10,000 retirees in Canada who thought they had sufficient retirement income. They are about to lose 30% to 40% of their income and all of their health benefits at a time when they need them most. We cannot wait for more consultations. The government must take immediate action to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and treat retirees as preferred creditors.

When will we see the necessary legislative amendments to protect retirees?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as was stated in the Speech from the Throne, work is being done on that issue. It is an important issue for Canadians and we have to try to move forward on that issue. But on the broader pension issue, again I say to the member opposite, we have one of the best pension systems in the world in Canada, something we can be proud of and we will make it better.

* * *

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week Corporal Darren Fitzpatrick died as a result of injuries sustained in Afghanistan. We have offered our condolences to his loved ones.

This death took us by surprise. Since 2007, the government reports on wounded soldiers only once a year, citing operational risks.

No one wants to put our troops in danger, but would monthly reports not allow us to give more help to the wounded when they return home?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like the hon. member and I am sure all members, we send our condolences to Corporal Fitzpatrick's family. I had the poignant experience of speaking with the family today.

I would indicate to the hon. member that the aim around disclosures of information is meant to meet a public balance and that is of course to ensure that any decision taken around disclosures of information is in keeping with decisions taken by the commander on the ground firstly, done so recognizing the importance of the necessity of operational safety; that is, to not endanger our troops by giving information that would assist the Taliban.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is the same government that wanted to shut out the media and the public from military repatriation ceremonies. The families of fallen soldiers spoke loudly. They wanted to allow Canadians to share their grief. The government always wants to manipulate the news. Wounded soldiers and their families have the right to be supported by Canadians. To support them and respect them, we need to know about them.

When will the government put care for wounded soldiers over concealing the numbers?

● (1435)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as mentioned, this was a decision taken by the commander on the ground in Afghanistan.

With respect to disclosures, the yearly release of information avoids any direct incident-specific correlation between Taliban actions. Precise information of that nature, with respect to locations, the number of injuries, could, in some ways, assist the Taliban in adapting their planning and their operations.

As a government, as a military, we will not do that.

* * *

[Translation]

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to the Canadian Transportation Safety Board, 12 airplane accidents that led to 28 deaths were caused by extreme fatigue experienced by the pilots, who have to fly ridiculous schedules. Airlines even advise pilots to fudge their logbooks. According to a number of studies, tired pilots act as though they are drunk.

How can the government ignore passenger safety when it has known for years that some companies are breaking the rules?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the safety and security of Canadians is a top priority for Transport Canada. We have a significant amount of regulations that are enforced, with respect to flight crew fatigue management. It is something that is incredibly important.

All of our rules follow the standards put forward by the International Civil Aviation Organization. All of them.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government always says that it is concerned. Yet, Transport Canada did not hesitate to change an important study on aviation safety by removing two recommendations concerning the effect of the biological clock on a pilot.

How can we believe that Transport Canada is worried about aviation safety when it has hidden information and refused to act since 2001?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we constantly seek to raise the bar with respect to the standards not just for aviation security but also aviation safety. That includes mechanical aspects of civil aviation, but also those men and women who work in the system. We are currently following all ICAO standards. There are a good number of recommended practices that have been suggested in recent years. The department has established a task force to address these and what we can do to raise the bar and do a better job for Canadians, and we certainly welcome the advice and counsel of the member opposite.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH**

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government, with the help of the Liberals, rejected a Liberal motion on maternal and child health because it said that it did not want to re-open the abortion debate. That is not the problem. The problem is that the Conservative government is calling into question a woman's right to abortion and, furthermore, that it is attempting to export its outdated ideology.

Why will the Conservative government not admit that all means of family planning, including abortion, contribute to the health of women and children?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me again just say that what we want to do is to ensure we take real action and save the lives of mothers and children. We already debated it in the House. We are going to move forward. We do not want to play political games. This is an important issue. We know we can make strides. We are receiving information. We are reading reports. I know that Canada will make a difference in the lives of those mothers and children.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a coalition of social groups including gynecologists, nurses and other public health experts reminded us this morning, with well-documented studies, that contraception and abortion save lives. Safe abortions are less expensive than unsafe abortions.

When will the government set aside its conservative and backwards ideology in order to work on improving the health of women and children?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can tell the member that I have personally read the report. I have met with Canadian representatives of every organization that was at the press conference this morning. CIDA officials will also be meeting with regard to the report, and that report will of course inform us as we move forward on this very important initiative to save the lives of mothers and children.

* * *

• (1440)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Veterans Affairs has admitted to making the new war memorial program nothing but a political slush fund. He refuses to use an already existing external committee to approve funding for a war memorial. His deputy minister recommends the use of this external committee, but the minister says he alone will make the decision on who gets funding.

Will the minister stop playing petty politics and respect our veterans? I ask the minister, will he listen to his deputy minister and allow the external committee to approve funding applications?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the 2010 budget, \$1 million in each of the next two years will be used to honour our military dead. We want to help Canadians build new cenotaphs. Naturally, our officials will analyze the projects submitted and a recommendation will be made to the minister.

[English]

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, surely the memory of those Canadians who made the ultimate sacrifice defending our freedom is beyond political partisan politics. These memorials are legacies for Canadians, not the Conservative Party.

The external committee contains real experts: veterans groups and heritage and conservation professionals. How dare the minister substitute his judgment for the judgment of our veterans?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is referring to the restoration of certain monuments. An advisory committee is looking at those proposals and will make suggestions to the minister.

Once again, the program for new monuments and cenotaphs is not yet available. It will soon be submitted to Cabinet for a final recommendation and we will then see what it contains.

It is quite proper that proposals are submitted to the minister and that the latter makes the final decision.

* * *

*[English]***THE BUDGET**

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Finance. Page 242 of the budget states that UPEI will receive \$30 million for infrastructure updates. The statement could not possibly be more clear.

I remind the minister that all members and all Canadians are entitled to assume that statements made in documents presented in the House are assumed to be accurate, correct and truthful.

My question for the Minister of Finance is very simple. Is this statement true, and if it is not, how could Canadians be expected to believe the government will honour any commitment in the budget?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the budget is accurate.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): If so, Mr. Speaker, considering that we are only 371 days from the time this expires, could the Minister of Finance today provide us with the details of the initiative he is talking about?

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the budget text clearly refers to the benefits to the economy of the island that we expect to see from these construction and renovation projects, benefits that will be seen not just on campus but throughout the local region as a result of the stimulus funding.

Budget 2010 notes on page 242:

Upgrades to the infrastructure at the University of Prince Edward Island will create over 300 jobs and inject about \$30 million into the economy.

* * *

INDUSTRY

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that our government is committed to job creation and economic growth. It is in line with our commitment to competition and foreign investment.

I would ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry if he could tell the House, and in fact why does he not just tell all Canadians, about new advancements in foreign investment and job creation?

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for this great and timely question.

I am pleased to announce that today the Prime Minister welcomed Kongsberg Defence & Aerospace's decision to create jobs and invest in Canada by opening a new manufacturing facility in London, Ontario.

This new facility is expected to directly create up to 100 jobs in the London area, with a further 500 jobs through supplier activity.

Kongsberg's decision confirms that Canada is open for business and will emerge from the recession more powerful, more competitive and more prosperous than ever before.

* * *

• (1445)

TAXATION

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is a major disconnect between what Canada's businesses need to be successful and the fiscal policies of the government.

Yesterday Bank of Canada governor Mark Carney blamed business leaders for Canada's "abysmal" productivity record.

Despite years of across-the-board corporate tax giveaways worth billions of dollars, Canadian corporations just are not investing and not improving their operations.

Will the finance minister admit that sweeping corporate tax cuts have failed to stimulate productivity, and will he instead adopt a plan of targeted assistance in key sectors to protect and create jobs?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the fact that by 2013 we will have one of the lowest corporate tax rates, between the provinces and the territories, in the G7. We have the lowest overall tax rate on new business investment in the G7 by this year, 2010.

Oral Questions

This is important for business in Canada, for small and medium size businesses to create jobs in our country. I am sure the NDP member wants to create jobs in Canada.

* * *

INDUSTRY

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do want jobs but long before 2013.

Steel slabs made in Hamilton by U.S. Steel are being shipped to the U.S., rolled into coils there and then returned to Hamilton for customers like Honda Canada. U.S. Steel is moving Canadian product 1,500 kilometres for processing in the U.S. when Lake Erie Works, a top-notch Canadian facility in Nanticoke, is left sitting idle.

In the Nanticoke plant, 1,100 jobs are on hold while steel is senselessly travelling back and forth across the border. Clearly there is no net benefit to Canada when steel imports from the U.S. are up by 74% in one year.

Will the government stop hiding behind its court case and act to help workers now?

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to talk about foreign investment and Canada's ability to compete with the world.

Canada has a record of standing up for greater competition under this government. In 2008, foreign direct investment in Canada reached \$505 billion, while Canadian investments abroad reached \$637 billion, almost \$130 billion more than direct investment in Canada.

Competition creates economic growth. It creates innovation and better options for Canadian consumers.

* * *

[Translation]

SECURITIES

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow the chief justice of the Quebec Court of Appeal will hear the arguments of the Government of Canada in connection with its intrusion in the securities field. Quebec stands united against such an attack by the federal government in this field of jurisdiction.

Could the Minister of Finance tell this House why he instructed his solicitors to divest Quebec of a financial lever that is vital to the Quebec nation?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do respect the jurisdictions of the provinces and the Government of Canada with respect to securities.

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister better show up in the Pierre-Basile Mignault Room of the Quebec Court of Appeal at 9:30 tomorrow morning.

Oral Questions

There are three clear issues. They deal with the Government of Canada's alleged jurisdiction over the regulation and voluntary registration of issuers. In the real world, that is nothing short of an attempt by the federal government to hijack Quebec's financial industry for the benefit of Toronto.

Should the Minister of Finance not focus on the real problems and refrain from breaking something that is working well?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a terrific financial system in Canada in many areas, and we are the envy of the world for the stability of our system.

We do not have that in the securities area. However, I do thank the chief of the Bloc opposite for his investments in the pétroliers in Alberta.

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POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Ann Coulter, the intellectual leader of the North American reform-conservative-republican movement, has the right to make her views known. In fact it is important for Canadians to be exposed to her obscene, radical and intolerant thinking, which underpins the extreme right.

Given her views are completely out of step with mainstream Canadian values, will the Prime Minister stand here today and, without equivocation, publicly denounce her views while explaining to Canadians the link between his party and Ann Coulter?

• (1450)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, apparently the member is obsessed about importing the views of an American political commentator. That makes sense given that he imported his leader from the same country. If he actually wants to engage in a broader debate about American politics, he has a leader who would be well qualified to do that.

Speaking of views that are out of touch with mainstream Canadians, that member authored the Liberal carbon tax, which was rejected as a radical job-killing initiative by Canadians.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Ezra Levant, who stepped aside for the Prime Minister and ran his last campaign's war room, sponsored her national tour.

The University of Ottawa Conservative club organized Tuesday's speech.

A former PMO and current Conservative assistant planned her reception at the Rideau Club

Rainer Knopff, co-author of the Prime Minister's firewall letter and a repeat and generous Conservative donor, is organizing tonight's speech in Calgary.

It is simple. Either the Prime Minister endorses her views or he does not. Which is it?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member raises a whole group of vitriolic accusations against a government whose fiscal plan many of his members rose to support just the other day. I wonder if he will berate them with the same vitriol as he blames himself for authoring an out-of-touch, radical, job-killing carbon tax, which led to his party's humiliating defeat in the last election.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for almost 40 years the B.C. coast has been oil tanker free. However, that is now threatened by the Enbridge pipeline proposal that promises to bring tar sand crude from Alberta to B.C.'s coast for export. All it would take is one accident to inflict serious damage on the coastal ecosystem and the economy. The risk is not worth it.

Will the government step away from this pipeline and reaffirm the moratorium on oil tanker traffic?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is an important Canadian project. We have put in place a high-calibre regulatory review that is commensurate with the importance of the project to ensure the environment is protected.

I can advise my colleague that I, along with the chair of the National Energy Board, created a panel approximately a year ago that consists of three respected Canadians: Sheila Leggett, Hans Matthews, who is himself a member of a first nation, and Kenneth Bateman. Following public consultation, the terms of reference have been defined. They include consideration of all the marine safety issues the hon. member raises.

The government will continue to ensure a comprehensive regulatory review process.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week a number of first nations, businesses and community organizations from across British Columbia came out against this pipeline proposal and the tanker traffic it would bring along. Yet the government is still working hand in glove with the Enbridge proposal to push this pipeline through.

When asked, the people of British Columbia have said they do not want this pipeline. They do not want the oil tankers off their coast.

Will the government stand with the people of British Columbia and say no to the Enbridge pipeline?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems a little early for my hon. colleague to have decided on the merits of the project, given that no application has yet been filed. That is commensurate, I suppose, with that party's approach on matters like the budget.

Nonetheless, we have appointed a review panel that consists of three of the most respected people in our country: Sheila Leggett, who is a sitting member of the National Energy Board, one of the most respected regulators in the country; Hans Matthews, a first nations citizen and an experienced geologist, as I recall; and Kenneth Bateman, a lawyer and also an experienced member of the National Energy Board. They will do a fine job of ensuring a comprehensive environmental review.

* * *

• (1455)

HEALTH

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Institute for Health Information released its latest report on wait times yesterday. Could the hon. Minister of Health please share some of the good news with members of this House?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the good news is that the report shows real progress in reducing wait times, which has been a priority of our government. We have been working closely with the provinces and territories to deliver health care and it shows that three-quarters of people in priority areas are receiving care within the target wait times.

We have also increased transfers by 6% every year to provinces and territories. As well, an additional \$1 billion were invested for the wait time reduction program. We will continue to work with the provinces and territories to improve health care delivery.

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GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, disclosure documents revealed that last year the Department of Natural Resources awarded \$185,000 to Streetlight Intelligence, a Victoria-based technology company. The company's chairman is the former chair of the natural resources committee, the Conservative member for Calgary Centre.

When the government is telling Canadians that it is time for belt tightening, how does it justify spending hard-earned tax dollars to further the private interests of a Conservative MP?

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, any spending has to be done with the interest of Canadians taxpayers in mind. I will gladly discuss this specific case with my colleague, who will be able to provide me with further details.

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OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the language rights of Coach Canada bus drivers are not protected by Bill 101, because they are governed by the Canada Labour Code. Since January, drivers in Montreal have been receiving their orders in English from Peterborough, because the company decided to dismiss its francophone dispatchers. This is happening in the second largest French-speaking city in the world, the largest city in the Quebec nation.

Oral Questions

Why does the Conservative government refuse to correct this situation, as proposed by the Bloc Québécois?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. Official languages are one of this government's top priorities. It is also a matter of great importance to my Bloc colleague. We will take a closer look at this situation and see what we can do.

* * *

[English]

CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Colombian trade deal has taken a sad new twist. Liberals and Conservatives believe they have found a way to fool the public concerned about murders and massacres there. What is it? It is self-monitoring. Unbelievably, the Colombian government gets to grade itself on its human rights record.

Liberals and Conservatives do not care that Colombia has a worsening record of human rights abuses and is the worst in the world for the killing of labour activists, with links to the violence going right up into the government itself.

Why is the government still flogging this amoral deal that repudiates Canadian values?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has always been prepared to advance human rights while advancing our trade agenda, unlike the previous government that did not want to talk about human rights when it did the same.

Certainly we are very concerned about the rights of Colombians and that is why in this trade agreement we have parallel provisions relating to labour, which cover human rights, and also with regard to the environment and protecting the rights of the people of Colombia.

We believe that by engaging through trade, we can advance the progress made by the Colombian government in advancing human rights and we are prepared to work together with the opposition in doing that as well.

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ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, through Canada's economic action plan, our government has worked co-operatively with provinces and municipalities to create jobs and hope in communities across Canada. To date, almost 16,000 projects are up and running in the largest cities and the smallest towns from coast to coast to coast.

Could the Minister of Transport tell us what the mayor of Sarnia recently said about our government's record when it comes to the success of our efforts to provide stimulus to local communities?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what a great question from the member for Sarnia—Lambton.

Business of the House

Let us look at what the mayor of Sarnia said. He stated:

We had more capitol spending last year than we've ever had. It's renewing the community and creating jobs for people. The [Conservative] government did the right thing by trying to stimulate the economy.

The fact is one of the roles of the federal government is to give hope to the people....

That is exactly the type of hope that the economic action plan, authored by the best finance minister in the world, is accomplishing for the people of Sarnia.

* * *

● (1500)

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, farm organizations are speaking out increasingly about the government's failed farm policies.

This week's *Hill Times* carries a full-page ad bluntly telling the minister that his remarks lack truth. The ad by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Ontario Pork, the Ontario Cattlemen's Association and Ontario Grains & Oilseeds, among others, states, "Ontario farmers tell us that AgriStability does not work".

Why does the minister consistently misrepresent the facts? Will he listen and act on farmer concerns?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just like a prime-time soap opera, we have been waiting months for the sequel. Finally, here it is and nothing has changed. The member is caterwauling about the right of every farmer to speak out against what they see as working or not working.

We know full well, from our work within the farm sector in Ontario and across this great country, that our programs are far superior to what that party ever brought forward under CAIS. We continue to work with our provincial counterparts to make them even more accountable and bankable for farmers, and we will continue to do that.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the climate change skeptics, these dinosaurs who do not believe in science or climate change, are poisoning the Conservative government. For example, Christopher Essex, Mark Mullins and John Weissenberger, three climate change skeptics, have been appointed to the Canada Foundation for Innovation and to the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada. These appointments are in addition to the cuts to the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences.

Instead of attacking scientific research, why does the government not present a credible plan to fight climate change?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, that is not the case. Once again the Bloc Québécois missed one of today's top stories. According to the Pew report, Canada ranked sixth in terms of its clean energy investment when compared to GDP in 2009.

Canada is ahead of the United States, which ranked 11th with an investment of \$11 billion in clean energy since 2008. The Bloc should applaud our efforts.

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MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the last time I asked the Minister of Industry to listen to the people in northern Ontario and grant FedNor independent agency status, he said that my constituents and I should be pleased even if the Queen of Sheba becomes the director of FedNor. The Queen of Sheba does not come from northern Ontario.

That is why I reject his proposal and I am again asking the minister whether he will finally grant FedNor the same status as the other economic development agencies.

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we must remember that it was this government that gave FedNor stable five-year funding. We must remember that it was this government that created the community adjustment fund, which is delivering over \$30 million toward economic development projects right across northern Ontario. Most important, we must remember that it was that party that voted against any funding.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the government House leader would outline his program for House business for the period between now and Easter.

In answering the question, I wonder if he could bring some order into this issue around documents that were tabled in the House of Commons today. They were tabled in a rather disorderly way, without any reference to the outstanding process that has been started by Mr. Iacobucci. I wonder if the government House leader could indicate when further documents will be forthcoming to the House. Since they come in such large volumes, it would be of assistance to have greater order in the presentation of those documents, including sufficient copies made available in advance so that all members could have access to them at the same time and, therefore, better understand exactly what they mean.

● (1505)

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to offer my condolences to the hon. House leader for the official opposition, given the fiasco that occurred in the chamber last Tuesday night when some of his members did not know how to vote. I can certainly sympathize with the embarrassment that I am sure he felt.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[Translation]

**CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT
IMPLEMENTATION ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Colombia and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Colombia, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the motion that this question be now put.

The Speaker: Before question period, the hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi was able to complete his speech. He now has 10 minutes for questions and comments on his speech.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to what the hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi said.

I think that what matters most today is that it is election time in Colombia, and independent observers monitoring the situation are accusing the Colombian government of fraud, spreading fear among the population and attempting to intimidate the population. All this information can be found in the report of the pre-electoral mission in Colombia.

In light of the undemocratic situation in Colombia, why is the Conservative government refusing to step in and push the Colombian government to do the right thing and establish democratic rules for those elections?

Also, how come they got a merit award when the government is trying to push this agreement through the House of Commons without the kind of debate that the human rights violations in that country call for?

● (1510)

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my NDP colleague for his two excellent questions.

With respect to the first question, I think that the government is looking out for itself in preparation for the next election. There are not many bills right now that do not have to do with law and order. This bill, which would implement a trade agreement with Colombia, could be considered openness in the next election. I must point out that the Conservative government has not shown much openness. That is why I think this bill is pure vote-chasing. I do not understand why the Liberals decided to support it, unless they too are afraid of voters. But they do not know when an election will be held.

The two questions my colleague asked are essentially related.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again I guess we cannot address often enough the fact that we are here today, and the bill is still viable, entirely because of the Liberals. The bill was completely dead and the government would never have reintroduced it had it not been for the agreement that was cooked up between the government and the Liberal critic.

On the issue of the documents, which I think would be more likely a question for question period rather than contained in the order of business question, as posed to the government House leader on Thursdays, I would point out that it has always been the intent, and it has been our commitment as a government, to make all legally available documents available to the opposition and, through the opposition and Parliament, to Canadians at large when they do become available, which is what happened this morning. The documents were in their original form. Some of them were in English and some were in French and we made that known at the time we tabled them this morning. We asked for permission, acceptance, approval and agreement of all opposition parties, and they gave that approval before those documents were tabled in the House of Commons.

I find it a little ironic that the opposition has all along been demanding these documents and yet, when we make them available, they criticize us for doing so.

As for the issue of the House business for the upcoming week to carry us through to next week, we will continue today with Bill C-2, the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement.

Tomorrow we will begin with Bill C-3, gender equity in Indian registration, and Bill C-2 will be the backup bill should we need it tomorrow.

Next week we will continue with the bills from this week but we will also be introducing the budget implementation bill and it is our intention to begin debate on that bill at second reading.

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**CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT
IMPLEMENTATION ACT**

BILL C-2—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, we have debated it for over 30 hours in this chamber and the standing committee has already studied it twice. Unlike the Bloc and the NDP, this government is committed to pursuing a free trade agenda. Therefore, I would like to advise that an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Order 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-2, 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.

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

Government Orders

We know that it was only last year that the House Standing Committee on International Trade recommended that a human rights assessment impact be undertaken.

Under the former Liberal leader, the critic of the day was 100% on side with doing that. Then there was this coup in the Liberal Party. It changed leaders overnight and appointed a new critic, and now the critic has taken the Liberal position from the left over to the extreme right. Now its position is indiscernible from that of the Conservative Party.

As a matter of fact, the Liberal critic has been quoted as saying that Colombia has more robust labour rules than Canada does, and there are other quotes that would certainly question our understanding of what this deal is all about.

I would ask the member once again to give us some ideas as to why he thinks the Liberals flip-flopped back and forth so fast in such a short time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, before I answer that question, I would like to add that introducing strong, robust laws in Colombia will not do any good if they are not enforced.

The government is looking to protect Canadian investments that will be made there. It means nothing to them to sign an agreement with Colombia, even though there are robust laws, since they are not enforced.

Why did the Liberals change their minds so fast? As I explained earlier, in the event of an early election, the Liberals are afraid of being perceived as not being open to international trade. But they do not explain the real dangers of violating human rights or the dangers of signing an agreement with a very poor country. We cannot sign a balanced agreement with a poor country.

● (1515)

[*English*]

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have some quotations from civil society, human rights, and labour leaders in Colombia on this agreement and the amendment and its requirement to have annual reports tabled to both parliaments and be debated in, for instance, our House of Commons trade committee.

Dr. Jorge Rojas Rodriguez, a civil society leader in Colombia and president of the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement, says:

...this proposal sends a strong political message to Colombia about Canada's interest in seeing the human rights situation improve in the coming years.

Dr. Leon Valencia says:

I think it is...useful that the Free Trade Agreement between Colombia and Canada includes an amendment which requires both governments to present an annual report to the respective Parliaments on the repercussions of the agreement on human rights in each country.

This will provide an important yearly forum to discuss the situation in Colombia, and will give Canadian citizens the opportunity to monitor human rights violations in our country.

Colombia's human rights leaders actually see this agreement as a step forward, in terms of human rights engagement. I would hope the Bloc would stand with the people of Colombia, who are seeking better economic opportunities and better human rights engagement

and support. We do not want to isolate Colombia and its people but instead to engage them as partners in progress as these fine people move forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I do not think that the hon. member heard a single word of my 20-minute speech. How could he say such a thing if he had been listening? Two Colombians are telling us that humanitarian laws are slightly better than they used to be, but our colleague just said that 48 trade unionists were killed in 2008.

Perhaps the situation has improved, but 2008 was not 20 years ago. It was only two years ago. Even if things have improved, it is not enough. I do not understand why the Liberals feel it is not serious that people are being killed. They are only worried about trade. To me, the fact that 48 trade unionists were killed is very serious. It is unacceptable.

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I think that my colleague, who knows this issue like the back of his hand, will be able to answer my question.

An NDP member mentioned why the Liberals, supported by the Conservatives, have re-opened the Pandora's box that is the free trade agreement with Colombia.

Is it possible that these two parties in the House support the mine owners and lobbyists who have specific interest in Colombia and that that is why they want to sign this treaty and enter into free trade with Colombia?

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. I think it is pretty clear that certain interests are at stake, and this explains their actions.

As I have already indicated, this is not a matter of trade, because the people of Colombia are poor. This is so that companies can mine there, without having to respect the environment, people's health, the unions or the areas around the mines. This is very important. We should not blindly accept this simply because two people from Colombia—who probably have a vested interest—tell us that human rights practices are improving.

The Liberal Party certainly found a compelling lobby to follow. That explains why they changed their minds so suddenly.

[*English*]

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we were debating this bill before the House was suspended for the government to recalibrate. The bill was formerly known as Bill C-23, and now we have brought it back as Bill C-2. At this second reading, I want to participate in debating the bill on behalf of my party and to add a few comments that do not directly affect the bill itself, but deal peripherally with it as a result of some of the comments made today during debate. The minister's response was a low blow in terms of our position as Liberals and was uncalled for, if I may say.

Here we are as the official opposition standing in support of the free trade agreement with Colombia. Yes, the hon. member from the Conservative Party is acknowledging that. Maybe what he should do is tell the Minister of International Trade to be a little more polite in his response, because we are not going to allow the new Conservative Party to give us a lesson on human rights. We are noted as the party of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, unlike that party, which had to change its name not once and not twice, because Canadians were literally scared of them. However, I am going to get to the essence of the bill.

Last week I held a round table discussion with Ms. Adriana Mejía, a senior minister from Colombia whom we were very fortunate to have visiting with us. She is the deputy minister of foreign affairs in Colombia. In light of the concerns about the human rights situation in Colombia, I thought it would be a great opportunity for us Canadians to hear what the minister had to say, to hear of some of their initiatives and, of course, to question the minister.

I am very pleased to report to the House and Canadians that we had a packed house. There were members from the government, the Liberal Party, the Bloc and there were no members from the New Democratic Party. Well, we might say that maybe they did not know about it, but they knew because I went out of my way to invite them personally. I am very disappointed they could not find one member in their caucus, especially if they were so concerned, to be there and ask questions of that visitor of ours. Nevertheless, the minister went into a very in-depth presentation. She had a deck with her that I will go through and point out certain initiatives they have undertaken to address some of the concerns that we have and other members of the international community and, of course, the UN have.

However, before I go there I want to remind members that last May, before our summer recess, I chaired the committee on international trade and our guest was President Uribe of Colombia. The gentleman was very gracious and gave us a lot of latitude. Whereas initially the Colombians had said no to having any cameras or anyone else there, the president then said, yes, invite the media and people in and let them hear, as we have nothing to hide.

Of course, there were some very constructive yet tough questions put to him. I thought the questioning by the NDP was rude, given that we had invited a head of state of a foreign country. We might agree to disagree, but Canadians are a very well mannered and refined people and in a forum like that, we should ask the tough questions, but politely, civilly and in the Canadian way, and that was not done. I just wanted to put that on the record today.

Canada signing free trade agreements is nothing new, whether by that party or our party, basically the mainstream parties, if I may say, who have governed this country. It is maybe no coincidence that the New Democratic Party has never governed and most likely will never govern. Thank God, they never governed, as there has not been one trade agreement they have supported.

• (1520)

What leads Canadians to believe, with all this huffing and puffing, that they would even sign this agreement? Nothing does. Sometimes the viewership out there puts more credence into what people write as opposed to what politicians say. I will quote from an article:

Government Orders

The MPs should also press for an independent human rights impact assessment—

—which we have—

—as the Commons trade committee has already urged.

—and we are moving forward on that—

But at the same time they should challenge critics of the deal who argue that Canada would set back the cause of human rights by signing a pact. That has yet to be shown. The pact is broadly modelled on others Canada has signed with the United States, Mexico, Israel, Chile and Costa Rica in the past 15 years.

This agreement is patterned around similar agreements that we have made with our other trading partners. I have named some of them. What leads Canadians to believe that we are going to sway from the terms that we have set in the past? Are we going to make worse deals? No, I believe we are going to make better deals because we have learned from the past.

It is not that Colombia is going to make or break our economy, on the contrary. My attitude and the attitude of the Liberal Party is that if there is any kind of business that can be had for Canadians, whether they be Conservatives, Liberals or otherwise, let us go out and get it.

I am not going to go into the details on CAFTA, the Central America free trade agreement. For whatever reason, the Americans were off the starting block much faster than we were. They ratified it by one vote. Who ended up being hurt? Canadians got hurt. The Canadian pork industry got hurt. The beef industry got hurt. Various other sectors in our economy were damaged because the Central American countries signed the agreement with the U.S. and then our leverage as a country was diminished.

I do not want to see that happen here. I am not standing up to defend the government. I am standing on behalf of my party to defend Canadians, Canadian farmers, Canadian workers, Canadian manufacturers and Canadian producers. That is what it is all about. I and other members attended a luncheon and were very impressed when the minister used a PowerPoint presentation to walk us through the concerns that some of these parties are outlining with respect to other countries.

The European Union, an organization made up of 27 countries, is signing an agreement with Colombia. We know very well that European Union has very rigid guidelines as to its trade agreements. Spain is also signing bilateral agreements with Colombia.

With respect to unions, trade union leaders and workers numbered about 800,000 in 2002. Today, the number has doubled to just over 1.5 million. Who is preventing people from forming unions or associations in Colombia? They have doubled in number. With respect to trade union leaders and workers, in 2002, there were 99 trade unions and in 2009, there were 164. That is an 80% increase. To me, these numbers do not indicate that Colombia is taking away the rights of people to form associations or unions.

I will move on to talk about homicides. In 2002, there were just under 29,000 homicides. In 2009, there were a little over 15,000. We can see the concerted effort that has been made to address the concerns that not only the outside world has, but that they have as well.

Government Orders

•(1525)

In 2002 there were 2,882 kidnappings in Colombia, and in 2009 the number was down to 213. I think that is progress. As they say, Rome was not built in a day.

An hon. member: It was not 213.

Mr. John Cannis: Maybe my colleague from the NDP who made a comment should have been at the luncheon. Maybe he should have heard the minister. If he thought that the minister was lying, he would have had every opportunity to confront the minister, as the president was confronted last June by the NDP. Again I stress how tolerant the president, the head of state, was when he was literally bombarded with comments which I felt was an unprofessional approach. Nevertheless, the gentleman stayed, took the questions and he was gracious enough to respond.

Maybe those members do not like it when I present the facts, but I have to deal with facts. That is what Canadians must know, not the huffing and the puffing that comes from people on the extreme left who, if they had their way, there would be no way.

With respect to victims of massacre, in 2002 there were 680, and in 2009 there were 147. That again is progress.

In 2002 there were 1,645 terrorist attacks, and in 2009 there were 486. I believe they are going in the right direction.

With respect to displacements, there were close to 440,000 in 2002, and in 2009 there were 114,000. That is a success story in itself. Is the number of 114,000 all right? No, even that number is too high.

What these stats are showing us is that they are working on addressing this most serious problem.

I was visited by a gentleman by the name of Frank Pearl, who works with a government program that is investing millions and millions of dollars to reintegrate combatants into society, to reunite them with their families and retrain them so they can become progressive, constructive people within their society and work for a living as opposed to doing other unacceptable acts.

With respect to women's rights, there is an entire section on how they are addressing violence against women. On December 4, 2008, they approved law 1257 for raising awareness, preventing and penalizing forms of violence and discrimination against women. It is not as though they have neglected their responsibility towards women.

With respect to internally displaced persons, I have talked about how they have been reducing those numbers consistently.

I met Mr. Frank Pearl who was kind enough to share some information with me.

Let us turn to children, on whom we put such value here in Canada. I have often said in this House that unless we address the needs of our young men and women, their proper upbringing and early education, then our country will obviously miss out on the future. They are our future. Colombia is doing the same thing. They realize that as well. They are investing heavily in their young men and women.

Let me give an example regarding free education. As of October 2009, resources transferred to schools to subsidize education costs for vulnerable groups have provided benefits for 5,230,446 children. The goal established for 2009 was 4,670,000, so they have in essence exceeded their goal.

The Colombian government, as difficult as its past has been, is making a genuine effort to address the problems we are concerned about.

The way I see it that nation is going to trade with Europe. If it is not Canada today, it is going to be some other country tomorrow.

•(1530)

At the end of the day, my attitude personally, and I know I speak on behalf of my other colleagues on the Liberal side as well, is that we have a unique opportunity not necessarily to benefit by doing trade, not necessarily to go in there and sell them more goods and buy some of their goods as well, as that is secondary to me. We have a unique opportunity to go to this troubled spot, if I can describe it like that, a country that understands its shortcomings but wants to do the right thing. It is dealing with difficult circumstances. The most important thing I see for us is that we have an opportunity as a nation to go there and show them the Canadian way.

If we had taken this very aggressive attitude that we are hearing from the New Democratic Party and from the Bloc as well, we would not be doing any trade with China. We would not be trading anything with China. Just imagine how many jobs Canada would have lost over the years.

What did we do? We know now that human rights, labour violations, et cetera, have been addressed in China. Twenty or 30 years ago, we would not have been able to say that, but we went there. As former prime minister Chrétien used to say, "I will go there", and he did go there. He did engage with China and he did create jobs and opportunities. Most important, we showed them that there is a responsibility to everything and that it is not just a matter of producing goods and services and making money. It is a combination of things. This is what we are trying to do with Colombia as well.

We were ready to sign the Central America free trade agreement. I would be misleading Canadians and my colleagues here in this honourable chamber if I said that there were no violations in Central America. I am not going to name countries because that would be unfair, but I will just talk about the region. We know very well there are some troubled spots in almost any country in that region, but we were not prepared to go there. By not going there, we hurt our textile and garment industry, our pork industry, our beef industry, and many other industries that have lost out. We could have been there and showed them how we do things here in Canada.

I mentioned Mr. Pearl who was here to visit. The president himself was here and came before the committee, which I chaired, and the senior minister that I referred to was here. It shows us two things. It shows us that Colombia is not walking away. It is not saying it does not have problems. They are the first ones to say, "Yes, we have problems and we want to address them, but we also need help". If there has ever been a country on this globe that knows how to help, it is Canada. We have an opportunity to put our stamp on Colombia by engaging in this deal.

Government Orders

The United Nations has also put forth certain prerequisites. The United Nations is monitoring this engagement with Colombia very closely. It is not as though the UN is saying, “Go off and do your thing”. That is not how it is. That is how it is being portrayed right now by the NDP, and that is totally unfair and inaccurate. I do not like to use the word “lies”, but it is totally inaccurate, because the UN is on top of it. If the UN is there and if we do not respect it, we are also saying that we do not respect the UN.

I look forward to answering questions from my colleagues. The government's side, the Minister of International Trade and the secretary of state know what our position is. There is no room for low blows or rhetoric at this stage, given that we are more than prepared and happy to work with them to do the right thing.

• (1535)

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Liberal Party for its support on this bill. The reason I do that is that this is a much broader issue than simply a trade agreement.

One thing that history has demonstrated is that where countries enter into trade agreements and enter into agreements to arbitrate these disputes, the rule of law develops. Once the rule of law develops in respect of commercial activities, the rule of law in respect of human rights is not far behind. One follows the other. That is what unfortunately the NDP is missing here. It does not understand the connection between the rule of law in respect of commercial relationships and the positive implications it has for human rights.

I am wondering whether the member could comment on that.

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, I agree with him wholeheartedly. He hit the nail on the head. That is exactly what I am referring to about the Canadian way.

We are a nation that respects the rule of law. We are civil society and we are described as a model in many ways. It is not good having this model only within Canada.

My father taught me one thing. I will provide the fish, but I want to teach them how to fish as well. This is what we are doing. We are going there to show them how we do things. I do not believe we should only keep handing out support. We will hand out support, but we will also hand out knowledge, the way of doing things.

The minister talked about the rule of law, the way we do things, and that is what it is all about. We are not going to do it by sitting here in Canada and becoming an esoteric society and saying we are good. We live in a global economy. We live in the global village. We have an obligation to the future generations, especially Canadian generations, to get out there and do the right thing.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is strange that the member and his party are supporting this bill so firmly. They must have some sort of interest in these activities.

The member said that there have been only 213 murders recently. I find that number shocking. More than 30 members of congress have been arrested in Colombia, including members of the president's

immediate family. In addition, 60 paramilitaries are under investigation. These people under investigation work for the Colombian parliament. From 2007 to 2008, crimes committed by paramilitary groups increased from 14% to 41%.

One problem is the displacement of populations. The needs of the mining and agri-food sectors are the main cause of these displacements. What is happening to these people? They are not being properly relocated. They are being pressured by threats, murders and flooding. These people are being kicked off their land and mistreated.

How can the member and his party side with the Conservatives and support a bill that is bad for the people of Colombia?

[*English*]

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, the member is right. I have to be honest with him. I am not going to hide it anymore. I do have an interest and that interest is called what is good for Canada. It very simple.

On displacements, he is absolutely right. I guess he must have not heard when I gave the statistics, so I will give them again. With respect to displacements, in 2002 there was a number totalling 437,967 displaced people in Colombia. In 2009 it was 114,602. I am sorry that this is not zero. It should be zero, but find me one country in the world that is zero and I will ask it to please show us the way to do it.

That country is showing it is doing everything possible to address this horrendous situation. Surely we have an obligation to support that.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in his speech the member referred to Colombia as a trouble spot.

The fact is the Americans, who the government tends to follow, had a bill before the Congress for three or four years before we had a bill before the House of Commons, yet it has not been passed. It was not passed under George Bush's tenure. It has not been passed under Barack Obama's tenure. In fact, it is not likely to be passed any time soon. Just a month ago Republican Congress people told us that this deal would never pass the U.S. Congress as long as the Democrats were the majority party in the United States. That is certainly going to continue until November.

Why are the Liberals facilitating the government in a trade deal that the Americans have decided they do not want anything to do with?

• (1545)

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, first, this is Canada, not the United States.

Second, our system moves much more efficiently than the American's. We have seen the example most recently on the health care issue.

Third, President Obama has given guidelines to move forward on this trade deal.

Government Orders

Fourth, the Americans did beat us, as I mentioned earlier, on the Central America free trade agreement and Canada lost.

One thing he did say was that I called it a trouble spot. I agree. If it were not a trouble spot, we would not be having these discussions. We would not have the committee going in depth, hearing the concerns of witnesses et cetera, outlining and identifying concerns in areas directly to the president and down. He mentioned the fact about members of the president's entourage running an investigation. Find me one country that does not have some troubles and will call it Utopia.

Let us not take the holier than thou approach and say that there is total innocence. There is no total innocence in Canada, and there will be never be anywhere.

It is a trouble spot. That is why Canada needs to go there to do it the Canadian way, to show people the Canadian way.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member, my colleague and the vice-chair of the House of Commons trade committee. Does he believe the amendment we have proposed has the capacity to make a real difference, in terms of human rights engagement on a long-term basis in Colombia?

Gerardo Sánchez, the president of the apparel and textile industry of Colombia, has made the following statement, on behalf of the following Colombian unions, fibre and plastics, mechanics, soft drinks and beverages, fruit farming, sewing and embroidery, footwear, flower growing, energy, water, telecommunications, textiles and apparel. He says:

This procedure is welcomed by Colombian workers and we are thankful to the... Parliament of Canada for its position, because it helps strengthen a mechanism already in place that monitors and evaluates the progress in matters of human rights and freedom of association in our country, through annual reports to the...(ILO) and the United Nations.

It also helps our efforts, as trade unions, in [dealing] with the national government to adapt our legislation to the international standards...

Does the member agree with some of these union leaders in Colombia who see our proposed amendment as being constructive?

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, the critic for international trade, the member for Kings—Hants, is absolutely right. It is all a matter of monitoring. The recommendations speak for themselves. The fact is it would be monitored and addressed by both governments involved and the UN on a yearly basis. It is not just some paper that has been written, or an idea. It is an enforcement mechanism.

I will close with this. The fact that the number of unions, something which I outlined in the statistics I provided earlier, and membership in unions are on the rise is indicative of the fact that the country and that government is saying that it is not adverse to the protection of workers, child labour, women's rights, et cetera.

I believe it will go a long way with these reports. It is a statement of confidence, and I cannot thank him enough for that input.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in the House today, yet again in opposition to the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement. This time it is Bill C-2, 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.

Before I get into the substance of the bill, I will say a word about the process. This is the second time the government has had to introduce the bill. It has been unable to pass it in each of the last two sessions of Parliament as a result of the staunch opposition to this agreement by the NDP caucus and by the Bloc, but in particular, because of our critic for international trade, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Unfortunately, the Liberal members of the House have been as keen to get the bill passed and out of the public limelight as the Conservatives have been. They know that when it comes to human rights, environmental and labour issues, this is a seriously flawed agreement, but their friends on Bay Street are pushing them hard to support the bill. Just as they have done on so many other occasions, they have completely rolled over.

In theory, therefore, the bill should have passed a long time ago, but the member for Burnaby—New Westminster has almost single-handedly out-organized them. Recognizing that people right across the country, and indeed around the world, are opposed to this trade agreement, he has built a coalition that will do anything in its power to stop this deal from coming into effect, and we in the NDP caucus have been representing those views in the House. I think every one of our members has spoken on the bill. Many of us more than once. We are doing it because the only tool opposition members have at their disposal to stop a bill from passing is to debate it until there is no time left at the end of the session for the bill to get to a vote. We have done that twice now, once in the spring session of last year and once again last fall.

Now we are dealing with the bill a third time, and we are prepared to go to the wall again. What is at stake is nothing less than the protection of human rights, environmental protection and labour rights.

Let me address each of these concerns in turn. Since we are on the eve of Earth Hour, let me start with the environment.

To the extent that free trade agreements result in increased investment, there are often corresponding issues of environmental degradation. This danger comes in one of two forms: a lack of adequate monitoring and enforcement of existing environmental regulations; and shortcomings in domestic environmental policies.

The issue of monitoring and enforcement relates directly to the conflict in Colombia. The Colombian government does not have an effective presence in all parts of the country. As a result, its capacity to perform functions such as enforcing environmental regulations is limited and business compliance with these regulations is low. As free trade increases investment activity, there is a corresponding increase in the likelihood of significant environmental damage.

Government Orders

The second issue is that Colombia's existing environmental policies and regulations are simply not sufficiently well developed. Environmental groups in Colombia point to the fact that Colombia has some internationally recognized environmental legislation and is a signatory to nearly all major international environmental treaties. However, they go on to point out that there was a struggle between two visions in Colombia, economic and environmental. Many sectors in Colombia have seen environmental laws softened or made of secondary importance to economic sustainability.

Much more work needs to be done to build stronger environmental policies and to strengthen evaluation and monitoring standards. For example, Colombia needs to adopt policies to protect sensitive areas and to guard against environmental threats. The Colombian government has not taken any steps to identify environmentally sensitive areas to protect from oil and gas exploration.

Similarly, the issue of deforestation of the jungle in Colombia to make room for large-scale agricultural plantations is also of great concern. Nearly 200,000 hectares of natural forest are lost in Colombia every year due to agriculture, logging, mining, energy development and construction.

The Canada-Colombia free trade agreement completely ignores these facts and fails to enforce environmental protection. The environment issue is addressed in a side agreement with no enforcement mechanism to force Canada or Colombia to respect environmental rights. The process is seriously flawed. It is just a smokescreen.

We have seen in the past how these side agreements are unenforceable. We just need to look at the North American Free Trade Agreement. There has not been a single successful suit brought under the NAFTA side agreement.

● (1550)

Let us be honest. The Colombian market is hardly a top tier market for Canada. Only 0.15% of Canadian exports actually go to Colombia. As Glen Hodgson, vice-president and chief economist of the Conference Board of Canada, has pointed out:

Our annual trade with Colombia is about the same level as with South Dakota, and it is actually smaller than with Delaware or Rhode Island. Compared to some other markets that are much closer, Colombia is not really a major player...80% of Colombia's imports to Canada are actually duty-free already, so the gains from free trade are probably not as great as they would be in other cases.

So why is this free trade deal such a priority for Canada? It has nothing to do with trade and has everything to do with investments. Since this agreement would contain investment protection provisions, it would help Canadian investors in Colombia, particularly in the mining sector.

If past agreements are any indication, the investment protection provisions in the Canada-Colombia agreement would contain provisions that would allow an investor to directly sue a foreign government if it adopts regulations that diminish the output on its investments. That means progress on environmental and labour laws would be actively constrained by the very language of the free trade deal. It puts the interests of Canadian investors ahead of any improvements in the Colombian standard of living. So much for the Conservative government's contention that this trade deal would

actually encourage and facilitate improvements to human rights and environmental and labour standards.

If I am right that this deal has much less to do with trade than with protecting the interests of investors, then it all comes down to politics. However, I would like to remind the government that concerned citizens in Canada far outnumber Canadian mining operations in Colombia and those citizens have made their opposition a clarion call to action.

The Prime Minister would be well aware of the literally thousands of postcards he has received from the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace. I am proud to have a particularly active chapter in my riding of Hamilton Mountain. It has gathered signatures from petitioners of all ages, calling on the government to live up to its commitment on corporate social responsibility.

Its message to the Prime Minister is clear: "At the June 2007 G8 meeting, you stated that the implementation of the recommendations from the National Round Tables on Corporate Social Responsibility and the Canadian Extractive Industry in Developing Countries report would make Canada a leader in corporate social responsibility. One year later, more than 200,000 Canadians told you that they want to see these recommendations implemented. Little has changed. Farmland, forests and water resources are contaminated or destroyed by some Canadian mining operations. People are denied access to and control of the natural resources they need to live in the just, dignified manner to which all are entitled...Standing with the people of the Global South, we insist that you develop legal mechanisms to hold the Canadian mining companies accountable for their actions abroad".

Here is the line that the Prime Minister really needs to hear: "We're not going away!" That is the real political message. Faith groups, labour groups, environmental groups, indigenous groups and human rights groups are all not going away, and neither are we in the NDP.

Let us look at some of the other concerns that are germane to this debate. As the labour critic for my party, let me go next to some of the issues raised by the Canadian Labour Congress when its president, Ken Georgetti, appeared before the Standing Committee on International Trade on behalf of over three million workers from across our country.

In essence, he argued that the signature of a free trade agreement with Colombia would condone the country's deplorable human rights record and implicitly endorse the Colombian government. Rather than sully its own image through its close relationship with Colombia, Canada should work to uphold its reputation as a human rights leader in the international sphere.

Government Orders

It is worth quoting Ken Georgetti at length, particularly since he addressed the question of whether the labour co-operation agreement provides for an open and robust dispute resolution process, which is the key to protecting labour rights. This is an excerpt of the CLC's submission. It states:

After close examination, we find no evidence to suggest that the Labour Cooperation Agreement, which accompanies the trade agreement, will increase protections for workers in Colombia. The CLC fully agrees with the Canadian Association of Labour Lawyers' statement that:

"(T)rade agreements are not written to improve labour standards and there is little evidence that such agreements can become vehicles for the enforcement of labour rights.

While some improvements have been made in the Canada-Colombia agreement, the essential structure of the labour clauses found in previous trade agreements (the NAFTA, Canada-Chile and Canada-Costa Rica), FTAs remain largely unchanged".

• (1555)

All of these labour side agreements exhibit the same deficiencies. First of all, provisions are found in side agreements rather than in the main text of the trade agreement. They focus on the enforcement of existing domestic labour laws rather than on raising labour standards. Enforcement mechanisms are slow and cumbersome. The dispute resolution mechanisms remain entirely at the discretion of the signatory governments. They are premised upon a model of political cooperation among the signatories and hence, the complaint process is not transparent as it should be and depends on bureaucracies of the parties rather than by independent or even quasi-judicial bodies.

The dispute resolution mechanism is in stark contrast to the rules established for disputes of investment in that the agreement offers no trade sanctions, such as the imposition of countervailing duties or the abrogation of preferential trade status in the event that one of the parties commits a violation regarding labour rights and standards.

Again, our long experience with NAFTA is instructive. Of all complaints submitted during the 15 years of NAFTA, all have ended with consultations among ministries of labour. Not one case has proceeded to an arbitration panel.

The Canada-Colombia free trade agreement is different from previous labour provisions related to Canada's trade agreements in a number of respects. It contains a chapter on labour that is internal to the main agreement, as well as a separate labour cooperation agreement, LCA, or labour side deal. The substance of the labour rights and obligation is found in the side deal, not in the main text.

In less than 500 words, chapter 16 of the CCFTA sets out general statements and objectives with regard to labour. They recognize their obligations under the ILO and affirm that it is inappropriate to encourage trade or investment by weakening or reducing protections afforded in domestic labour laws. Other than that, the labour chapter simply states that parties will obey their own labour laws and will administer the labour cooperation agreement.

In article 1 of the Canada-Colombia labour cooperation agreement, the parties agree to ensure their laws embody ILO principles. The LCA begins by affirming the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, while two commitments refer to the ILO's decent work provisions. This is an important improvement over previous LCAs. However, the obligations outlined in article 1 do not compel governments to make specific

improvements in labour law. Rather these basic commitments are basically a statement of good intentions.

In acknowledging basic ILO obligations, the side agreement goes beyond the NAFTA generation of labour provisions. Because Canada and Colombia are already obliged to follow these principles due to their membership in the ILO, however, this is not a particularly laudatory advance. As described in the ILO's follow-up report:

[According to the declaration] all Members, even if they have not ratified the Conventions in question, have an obligation arising from the very fact of membership in the Organization, to respect, to promote and to realize, in good faith and in accordance with the Constitution, the principles concerning the fundamental rights which are the subject of those Conventions, namely: (a) freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; (b) the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; (c) the effective abolition of child labour; and (d) the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

The parties agree that they will not waive labour laws in order to encourage trade or investment. This is a positive step. The problem, however, is that the word investment is deleted in all subsequent references to this goal in the complaints process. In other words, the LCA will not pursue a complaint that the labour law was not applied in order to encourage international investment. As well, the article allows the parties to waive labour laws for any other reason.

Neither is an egregious one time violation of the commitment to enforce labour law subject to sanction. Even if a party is charged with not enforcing its labour law repeatedly, or in a systematic way, then it is acceptable for that party to defend itself by saying it simply decided to allocate resources to some other pressing labour need. Thus it shall not be considered in violation of the agreement and complaints can be dropped.

Articles of the LCA provide for submission, acceptance and review of public communications, which may lead to ministerial consultations between the parties. A review panel may be requested, not by the complainant but by the other party and then convened.

• (1600)

If it considers that the matter is trade related and the party under review has failed to comply with its obligations under the agreement a report is issued. If a party refuses to comply with the report, the panel may then impose a monetary assessment of not more than \$15 million U.S. annually, which is paid into a fund to be expended on appropriate labour initiatives in the territory of the party that was subject of the review.

This is the only penalty for labour rights violations under the agreement. To paraphrase, the shocking reality is that in the event of the murder of a trade unionist in Colombia, labour protection simply means that the Colombian government would have to pay money into a development fund. Kill a trade unionist, pay a fine.

Over 2,200 labour activists have been murdered since 1991 and the hunt for trade unionists in Colombia will go on if the price is right. Such is the Conservative government's concept of labour protection.

Government Orders

The penalty for killing a trade unionist was capped at \$15 million in any one year paid by the Colombian government into a development fund. To put this in perspective one year's maximum payment of \$15 million equates to \$5,628 per trade unionist already killed.

How would Canadians feel if the Prime Minister agreed to the same kind of treatment of those who intentionally set out to kill labour organizers within our own borders? This is an outrageous lack of appreciation of human life and it is no labour protection at all.

For all of those reasons the Canadian labour movement believes that the labour side deal will not guarantee labour rights and freedoms because even the weak laws that do exist are not enforced nor will they be enforced as a result of this labour co-operation agreement.

Labour rights are not respected. Workers are not protected. There is a lack of social dialogue and violence is being used deliberately against the trade union movement to eliminate it as an effective defender of workers' rights.

The labour side deal provides no enforceable rights for workers. It is subordinated to the main text of the agreement. There are no mechanisms for independent action by trade unionists and the offending governments have wide sway over what happens in any proceedings that are brought by the other party.

Simply issuing a fine when other trade and investment conflicts are dealt with in all seriousness through investor-state arbitrations, judicial or quasi-judicial bodies, and the party-to-party dispute resolution system, indicates the cynicism embedded in this agreement.

To the question of whether the labour co-operation agreement would be considered an historical advance in defence of workers' rights, the CLC clearly says that it is not.

I know that my time is winding up and I have not even had a chance to address the myriad of other well documented human rights abuses whose victims are primarily human rights advocates, journalists, indigenous people, Afro-Colombians and, as I said earlier, members of unions.

Such abuse is rampant in Colombia. Let me paint a quick picture of what is happening in Colombia. The Uribe Colombian government has one of the worse human rights records in the world. There are 3.8 million internally displaced people, 57% of which are women. The UN calls this the worst humanitarian disaster in the western hemisphere, and it is growing. Nine hundred and fifty-five cases of extrajudicial executions by the army over the last five years have been documented, and the numbers are rising.

Colombian soldiers are accused of executing peasants in rural areas and passing them off as leftist rebels killed in combat, a practice that is known there as false positives.

Sixty-two mafia-like ex-paramilitary, drug-trafficking criminal networks control economic activities and political institutions in 23 of the 31 provinces and are vying with guerrilla groups for control of the drug trade. Despite the demobilization of over 31,000 paramilitary death squad members, abuse and insecurity prevail in the countryside.

Over 60 lawmakers, including senators, governors and mayors representing the president's political coalition are under investigation by the country's attorney general and supreme court for alleged relationships with paramilitary chiefs and collusion and elections fraud. Seventeen are in jail together with Uribe's former head of secret services and campaign manager and high ranking military officials.

Given our knowledge of what is happening in Colombia, it is essential that Canada wield a stick to encourage improvement in Colombia rather than offering Colombia rewards. Rejecting the free trade deal would send a strong signal to the Colombian government that human rights are a vital key to gaining legitimacy in the international sphere.

At a minimum, before ratifying and implementing an agreement with Colombia, we must develop and implement a human rights impact assessment to ensure that there are binding and enforceable protections for labour and human rights within the framework of fair trade.

• (1605)

In fact, both the Canadian and Colombian governments should welcome such an independent and impartial assessment, after all, they claim that conditions have improved and human rights violations have decreased. However, in reality they know that the situation in Colombia would never pass such scrutiny and, if they know that, they must stand in the House and vote against the free trade deal between Canada and the Republic of Colombia.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question about something that was mentioned earlier and peaked my interest. Dr. Jorge Rojas Rodriguez is a civil society leader in Colombia and president of the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement. He says succinctly that "this proposal sends a strong political message to Colombia about Canada's interest in seeing the human rights situation improve in the coming year".

He also points out on several occasions where a civil society in preparation for this innovative proposal, he calls it innovative, believes the amendments have the potential to set an important precedent for free trade agreements, but he also links that to the improving of human rights in this particular situation.

Dr. Leon Valencia says much the same thing. He says:

This will provide an important yearly forum to discuss the situation in Colombia, and will give Canadian citizens the opportunity to monitor human rights violations in our country.

I sincerely ask what is so wrong about what these people are saying that compels the member to shut down the negotiations and to call off this agreement, which many people feel could be the vanguard toward better relations with Colombia, in much the same way that some people will say that with China we have also improved the record there as well through initiatives around free trade?

Government Orders

•(1610)

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, I really welcome this question because the plan that the member just asked me about is the Liberal amendment to the bill that is before the House. What that amendment suggests is that both parties need to table reports here in Parliament so we can debate whether the “conditions” of this trade agreement are being met.

I know that my Liberal colleague loves such reports but I also know that the Conservative members in the House love those report cards even more, because they laughed themselves silly when the Liberal leader said that he would issue a report card on the Prime Minister. Nobody in the House took those reports seriously, and that is what is wrong with the Liberal amendment.

We do not need report cards. We need action. We cannot say that we will let the abuses happen and then we will report on them after, then we will think about them and see how we can improve them. We need action now. The human rights abuses need to be stopped before they happen. This trade agreement is flawed because it exacerbates those tensions, those issues in Colombia, and we need to take action to stop them.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a good thing that ridicule never killed anyone, because this House would sustain numerous losses.

I have heard the Liberals talk about an amendment to monitor the human rights situation in Colombia. Since we started talking about this agreement—over the past few years, three years at least—the human rights situation in Colombia has not improved, it has deteriorated. Now, they are saying they want to sign the agreement and monitor the human rights situation, as if monitoring the situation was going to make things better.

I find the amendment the Liberals are about to put forward completely ridiculous. As media reports and various situations show, increasing numbers of trade unionists are being murdered and entire populations are being displaced.

I would like to hear my colleague on that.

[*English*]

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, I could not agree more with the hon. member. Either we believe in human rights or we do not, and to suggest, as my Liberal and Conservative colleagues have, that human rights are getting a little bit better is like saying that somebody is a little bit pregnant. Either we believe in human rights or we do not.

If the Liberal and Conservative members are so sure that their perspective on human rights in Colombia would stand up to scrutiny, then why would they not agree at the front end to implement a human rights impact assessment so that we know exactly what is happening in an objective way, instead of statistics that are being thrown about here with absolutely no validators to support an agreement that is seriously flawed.

It is not just the Bloc and New Democrats who are saying that. People who have been on the ground, like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and unions from across this country, including

the CLC which represents over three million workers, have all arrived at the same conclusion. People might say that I am wrong but I would suggest that those groups are definitely not.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, given that my colleague from Hamilton Mountain is our labour critic, I know we can depend on her to bring labour issues forward. She has talked about environmental and labour laws. She has talked about no trade sanctions for violations and for a waiver of labour laws.

She also talked about NAFTA, which is the one I want to touch base on. The results of what happened with NAFTA have created a lot of problems for Canadian industries and companies. I was at the Cattlemen's Association dinner reception last night. They indicated that they were not against trade deals but that they wanted to see fair trade deals. They did not want to see what happened with NAFTA.

Could my colleague advise us as to what the biggest import is from Colombia into Canada at this point?

•(1615)

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry I missed that reception last night with the cattlemen. I am really glad that my colleague had the opportunity to go. I am pleased that she is asking this question because much of the argument here, particularly on the government side, has been about the need for this improved trade relationship.

In reality, if we were to unravel the agreement, we would see that what is coming into Canada is beef and grain. Some Canadians who are watching today may think we have plenty of beef and grain of our own and that we do not need a free trade agreement with Colombia. What is really at stake is not trade at all. It is not about beef and grain. It is about Canadian corporations having the right to invest in mining operations in Colombia, which is why we are so worried about the displacement of indigenous people and Afro-Colombians, and about the degradation of the environment.

Canadians are profoundly worried about corporate social responsibility and the government's inaction on those important issues. People are rallying together around what is happening in the global south and this trade agreement does absolutely nothing to enhance those objectives.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, in the past, the member and her colleagues have mentioned the labour agreements that have been agreed to here. Just yesterday I noticed that the government tabled a prospective free trade agreement with Jordan that also includes parallel agreements regarding labour.

Some of the things that interest me very much would be workers' compensation and the like. She takes specific aim at these measures, not just the specific measures but also outside of this agreement. Yesterday, one of her colleagues mentioned including this within the text of the free trade agreement.

I am assuming what she means is that it will have a far more beneficial effect, but does she know of a free trade agreement that does that? In essence, how would that be more powerful than the parallel agreements we speak of here?

Government Orders

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my speech, the side agreement is completely inadequate on its own. Moving that inadequate side agreement into the main agreement would do absolutely nothing. If we are serious about protecting labour rights, we need to have that comprehensively addressed in any trade agreement that we sign.

More important, it is not just what we have on paper. As part of that, we need to set up a mechanism for enforcement, otherwise those rights are not worth the paper they are written on. From that perspective, as I just spent 20 minutes talking about, this agreement between Canada and Colombia is seriously flawed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time I have spoken to Bill C-2.

I sat on the Standing Committee on International Trade, and before the agreement was signed I was also in Colombia as part of a delegation to meet with unions, various NGOs, women's groups, labour groups, businesses and members of the government, in order to assess whether this agreement was valid or not.

At the time, it was the Standing Committee on International Trade that was studying this agreement. The government sent us to Colombia at great expense to observe the situation. However, before we could issue our report and recommendations, following our meetings with members of the government, unions, labour representatives and various groups involved, the government signed the agreement. It is unbelievable.

I was truly shocked to see that a government could be so irresponsible and waste public money that way. Sending a delegation of members of Parliament to Colombia to meet with stakeholders costs money. If the government had any respect for the democratic process, it certainly would not have signed the agreement before reading the recommendations of the Standing Committee on International Trade. But it did sign the agreement and we made recommendations afterward. It is a nice file that probably ended up on a shelf somewhere in the Library of Parliament.

The government went ahead with this agreement. Everything the members who are against this agreement have said in the House is in the recommendations and the observations that were made during our visit to Colombia.

The Conservatives often complained about the debate being hijacked. According to them, too much importance was being placed on the issue of human rights, because this was a trade agreement.

In a recent comment, I thought I heard the Liberals say that they wanted to propose an amendment to the Standing Committee on International Trade, to monitor the evolution of the situation in Colombia.

For two or three years, Colombia has been negotiating different agreements with Canada, as well as the United States and European countries. For the most part, they are opposed to this agreement being signed, because of human rights violations in Colombia. The situation has not improved, and I do not see why it would change.

If I were a representative of the Colombian government and wanted to sign an agreement, I would have done everything I could

to make my country more democratic and to solve the problems related to violence and crimes against unionized workers. At least 30 government representatives are currently under investigation for criminal offences.

• (1620)

I would have also taken action to avoid the number population displacements. Mining is the primary activity of some Canadian companies in Colombia, and their practices leave thousands of Colombians homeless. They currently live in ghettos outside of Bogota.

We saw these ghettos, and the situation has not improved. Many unionized workers and union representatives are still being assassinated. Since mining companies must mine in new areas, entire populations continue to be displaced, and they are not left with any resources or means to survive. Statistics show that Colombia is not doing enough to improve the situation.

The United States is, by and large, against signing this agreement, as is Belgium. A press release from Belgium said that the government in the Flemish region also refused to ratify the Belgium-Luxembourg investment agreement with Colombia. Colombia is known for its violations of human, social and environmental rights. Belgium will also oppose the signing of this agreement.

In Canada, however, the Conservatives plan to ratify the agreement with the help of the Liberals, who intend to propose a so-called amendment, but that does not mean much. They will not necessarily vote for that amendment in the House. As we have seen this week, they are perfectly capable of voting against their own amendment.

The Conservatives, with the help of the Liberals, are determined to sign an agreement with a country that does not respect human rights.

We do not support this bill. Our position has not changed since the last session despite the amendment that the Liberals plan to present to the Standing Committee on International Trade.

This amendment is absolutely ridiculous in light of the changing situation in Colombia as reported in the media. Furthermore, statistics show that the number of murdered unionized workers is rising sharply. Violence against workers defending their rights has not diminished. No new environmental standards have been adopted to make mining companies demonstrate greater respect for the environment.

The Liberal amendment will not change a thing because the measure will be overseen by both parties to the agreement. According to the amendment, the governments of Canada and Colombia will be the judges and the judged when it comes to assessing respect for human rights. That is absolutely ridiculous.

Government Orders

Everyone is aware of the situation in Colombia. For the past several years, the country has been struggling with the longest-lasting internal conflict South America has ever seen. This long, seemingly endless conflict has resulted in countless human rights violations, including kidnappings, targeted killings and massive internal displacements that have relegated entire populations to ghettos.

During the Standing Committee on International Trade's mission, Liberal, Conservative, Bloc and NDP members saw all of this for themselves.

• (1625)

I do not recall if my Liberal colleague was with us on that mission, but I am sure that if he was, he saw the situation for many displaced people who had been kicked out of their homes and off their land.

During free trade negotiations, the fact that hundreds of thousands of people are being forcibly displaced and that union leaders and union members are frequently the targets of violence and murder should be particularly worrisome. Yet this does not seem to bother the Conservative and Liberal members. They truly believe that we must enter into a free trade agreement that will have little impact on the Canadian economy, and this has been pointed out on many occasions. In fact, this will help protect the investments of mining companies in Colombia and the people who are making money there. The economic spinoffs for Quebec and Canada are often minimal. Furthermore, these numerous human rights violations are taking place with the complicity of the Colombian government.

I see a member of the Liberal Party is exiting the House. Perhaps he can no longer bear to hear such things, but this is the reality.

The Conservative government, with the support of the Liberals, is saying that the political situation and security have improved considerably in Colombia. I do not know where they are getting their facts and statistics. According to documents obtained by the Bloc Québécois, the situation does not appear to have improved. I also heard some of our NDP colleagues attest to the same documents and the same facts. They agree that the situation has not improved.

La Presse and other international newspapers have reported that many other countries did not want to sign a free trade agreement with Colombia for this very reason. The Conservatives and the Liberals are doing some reading, but I do not know where they are getting their facts.

The free trade agreement between Colombia and the United States was drafted a few years ago, in 2006. We have been talking about an agreement with Colombia for two or three years. The United States has been debating it for four years. However, it has been delayed because the Americans do not want to sign it. Americans are not the most progressive when it comes to social and labour conditions. And yet, they are saying that they cannot sign the agreement because of the lack of respect for human rights. Fair trade requires rules and respect for environmental as well as labour standards. Colombia does not currently respect these standards.

In a speech, the Liberals stated that signing an economic agreement would lead to an improvement in the human rights record, and would help Colombians raise their standard of living as well as improve their living conditions. Let us not be fooled. We

know very well that the simple signing of a free trade agreement with this country will not lead to a better distribution of wealth or make the country take better care of the least fortunate, especially when about thirty members of the current government are facing criminal charges.

Will wealth be redistributed? Will they fight social inequality? Will they restore the livelihoods of those who have lost their land? No. We will not swallow it hook, line and sinker. Quebeckers will not believe all that. Quebeckers often say that something can always be done, but everything has its limits.

• (1630)

I think that this agreement has crossed the line. We are not complete imbeciles, yet that is what I am hearing in the House: skewed versions of the social, political, economic and cultural realities in Colombia and, above all, the reality of crime there. Neither the Liberal Party nor the people of Colombia seem to be taking the situation into consideration. They simply want to protect the investments of mining companies in that country. And those companies often undertake their activities without any respect for environmental standards.

In Canada and Quebec, 80% of imports have no tariffs. So this agreement would not significantly improve trade, given that 80% of imports are not even regulated by tariffs. We saw it in terms of international trade.

The President of the United States, Mr. Obama, repeated that he has no intention of signing this free-trade agreement with Colombia. He once again spoke of the terrible working conditions and the Colombian government's lack of respect for workers' rights. Add to that the fact that the government in Belgium's Flemish region does not want to ratify an agreement of this kind either. In Canada, however, the Conservatives and Liberals do not seem to be very preoccupied with or worried about respecting human rights.

It is disturbing to see political parties sign these kinds of agreements. These parties have governed in Canada and, unfortunately, they still have an impact on Quebec's economic development. We are still paying half of our taxes to Ottawa. These parties still have some influence on our social and economic policies. This goes against the values of Quebeckers. Working conditions, respecting the right to strike, respecting workers, unionized workers, women, democracy and justice, are all fundamental values in Quebec. However, this agreement seems to deny these values of solidarity and greater justice for citizens.

Human rights conditions have not really improved in Colombia. Last year, 49 union leaders were assassinated in that country, compared to 46 in 2008 and to 39 in 2007. Through their amendment, the Liberals want to keep track of what is going on in Colombia. I just provided a few figures. I hope that some Liberals will take note of them, because these numbers show what is happening.

Colombia wants to sign an agreement with Canada and with other countries, but the human rights situation is not improving at all.

Government Orders

According to a Human Rights Watch report released in February, illegal armed groups in Colombia have not been demobilized effectively and they continue their intimidation and violence campaigns.

We always get a little carried away because these are critical issues for the future.

In each bilateral trade agreement, it is important to know the reality in the country with which we are doing business. We should take the time to assess the consequences of our decisions, as much for us as for our partner country. Moreover, we should not take into consideration just the commercial aspects of the agreement, but also the human rights situation.

In the case of Colombia, I think that such an agreement—particularly because of the chapter on investment protection—is very worrisome and could affect even more Colombia's ability to protect its population's needs and interests.

• (1635)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): 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 Nickel Belt, Industry; the hon. member for Labrador, Status of Women.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague. I will not make a comment at this point as I believe I covered this earlier.

Some of the complaints being brought up in the House today are obviously about the lack of attention being brought to bear on human rights, but more about labour standards, which some member contend are not as great as they should be.

In the future, let us say with the Canada-Jordan free trade agreement or even the comprehensive free trade agreement we are now negotiating with the European Union, which I am sure my hon. colleague from Bloc would not have too much concern about, how would he propose changing these free trade agreements to allow for stronger labour standards and a stronger record on human rights?

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, our colleague's question is very interesting.

I remember during one debate in the last session, a member from the Liberal Party moved a motion on the corporate social responsibility of companies with economic activities in other countries, such as Colombia. I know the hon. member who moved that motion well. He is a good MP. Having these companies respect the environment while conducting their activities was really important to the Liberals, but we must also respect working conditions. We need to put an end to the exploitation of workers and unrelenting attacks against certain people. I am talking about murder. People are getting killed.

All these conditions should not factor into an agreement. This is not the type of thing we see in a free trade agreement with Europe. It

is more about fairer trade. As far as I know, in Europe, in France and Belgium, unions are respected.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for our Bloc colleague.

Earlier we were talking about mining companies. In my riding of Nickel Belt, there is a mining company from Latin America. Last week, a demonstration was held by roughly 5,000 people including dozens and dozens of unionists. Obviously, if we were in Colombia, the demonstration never would have happened because the unionists would have been killed.

I would like to know the Bloc member's opinion on this. Why do the Conservative government and the Liberals want to do business with a country like Colombia, which has no respect for human life in its own country?

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, I agree with our colleague who just asked the question.

As I said in my speech, human rights and union rights are not respected in that country. The problem is that Canadian companies are going to carry out their economic activities in these places and will often exploit the workers. It seems that there is a certain mentality in international trade. That could come back to haunt us, as we would say in Quebec, because companies become accustomed to not respecting unions and union members. They may condone abuse and violence to achieve their objectives when negotiating with workers.

I met with union leaders when I toured Colombia. These people have a great deal of courage. They are fighting to defend their rights. As we know, ties have been established between Canadian and Colombian unions. These ties should be maintained because important work is being accomplished.

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague gave a very good presentation. He has a very good understanding of the problems of Colombians. He is a former union leader and the citizens of Berthier—Maskinongé have a member who is well-informed.

The Liberals, together with the Conservatives, always try to minimize the impact of this agreement. They say everything is all right, that life is beautiful and that everyone in Colombia is doing their best to ensure that human rights are respected. That is simply not true.

Furthermore, they say that 114,000 Colombians were displaced last year in order to make more room for the mining industry. That is like moving an entire federal riding. They say that 114,000 is not a huge number because, before that, 400,000 people were displaced per year. Furthermore, Colombians are not displaced in a civilized manner. They are pressured, threatened, murdered or their land is flooded. That is how it is done in Colombia.

I would like to ask my colleague what does Canada stand to gain from signing a free trade agreement with Colombia?

Government Orders

•(1645)

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Shefford, who did an excellent job for a number of years as a member of the FTQ union. He is still just as passionate about defending humanitarian causes and workers' rights.

Some 30 members of the Colombian congress are currently under arrest. It is becoming increasingly clear that there is a link between the members of the Colombian congress and the paramilitaries, who play a big role by murdering many unionized workers.

The number of crimes committed by government security forces increased by 9% last year. The situation is deplorable.

As for Canada and Quebec's interest in signing an agreement with Colombia, members of the Bloc Québécois who were on the Standing Committee on International Trade brought up a specific chapter of the agreement regarding protecting investments. That is the focal point of this agreement.

The mining companies can develop resources in Colombia without having to respect environmental standards and human rights. Furthermore, if lawsuits are filed against these companies, their investments in Colombia will be protected. Precedents are not taken into account.

That is important. I noted that 80% of current Canadian imports from Colombia are not subject to tariffs. That is the only thing of interest we see in this agreement.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to Bill C-2, and I want to thank the member for Berthier—Maskinongé for his presentation. I did have a question for him.

A month ago, he and the member for Kings—Hants and I were on a congressional visit in Washington and this topic did come up in some of our meetings. Even though the U.S. bill has been before the United States Congress since 2006, as the member just indicated, it did not pass Congress while George Bush was president and has not passed Congress since Barack Obama has been president, and it will not pass Congress anytime soon. We were told in our meetings by Republicans who support President Uribe and the free trade agreement that they knew it was dead. We were not getting this from Democrats, but Republicans.

It makes one wonder about a group, the government and the Liberal opposition, that tends to follow the United States like little trained seals, like little puppy dogs who follow the Americans and do not do anything the Americans would not do. It seems rather strange that somehow they have quickly put together a little agreement here to get this deal on its way.

The question is, why? How does this deal made here benefit the Liberals? What do the Liberals have to gain from this? This whole agreement has caused them a lot of grief within their own party. Under the previous leader, they were onside asking for a human rights assessment. Then all of a sudden the leadership changed, the critics changed, and they flipped totally the other way and now support the government.

We managed to remove this bill by our efforts last year, and the only way it could possibly have been brought back was with the Liberals' compliance. The Liberals have now made an arrangement and put an amendment that is acceptable to the government.

The question is, for what? After all the grief they had put up with in their caucus, and we are promising them much more grief as the days progress, there must be a lot at stake here for the Liberals to be doing this. I do not know what the government had to promise them to get them onside. Perhaps it was nothing, but I just see a lot of effort being made here for very low returns.

It was pointed out by one of the speakers in the debate earlier today that this bill is nothing more than a red carpet for mining companies. Currently there is \$1.3 billion in trade between the two countries. That trade will not be affected by a free trade deal. If we do not pass the free trade deal this year or next year, the \$1.3 billion in trade will continue, so what is this trade deal supposed to accomplish?

Do we have projections? Has anyone seen any projections? I think I asked the question last year if anyone had seen any projections from the government of what two-way trade will be next year and the year afterward. We have not heard anything from the government on that. We have not heard any speeches from the government in the last two days. We have not heard much from the Liberals either.

It reminds me of that old song, I think by Peter, Paul and Mary, *Where Have All The Flowers Gone?* I just substitute the word "Liberals" there. I hear some comments from their bench, but the fact of the matter is that we have a lot of issues, a lot of bills, a lot of things to be addressed and done in this Parliament, and I have questions here.

•(1650)

The government talks about its tough on crime agenda incessantly, saying it is something that has to be done. It is, as Mulroney used to say, the sacred trust. What does the government do? It prorogues Parliaments and wipes out all the bills. So much for the sacred trust.

Now we get back into Parliament. Does the government bring back the crime bills? No. It wants to talk about free trade with Colombia.

Clearly, there is an agenda, one that certainly I do not understand. I do not know that we are really clear about it either. However, members of the Bloc, the previous speaker and others, have alluded to the fact that this is a red carpet for mining companies and big business, that this is all to support investment. They are presumably friends of the other two parties because I have not been lobbied lately by any big mining companies.

Most of the details of this agreement, in terms of why we should not sign it, have been spoken to by other members. For example, Colombia itself is not a significant trading partner with Canada. It is only our fifth-largest trading partner in Latin America. We have dealt with the whole issue of 2,690 trade unionist having been murdered in Colombia since 1986 and that the number in 2008 was up substantially the previous year. One Liberal said that it had been reduced so we were clear to go now.

However, I do want to talk about fair trade. Whenever the NDP opposes one of the Conservatives' free trade deals, they ask us what sort of deal we would support and what it would take to get the NDP to support a free trade deal. In response we say that it has to be a fair trade deal.

The fact is there are more people than the government thinks waking up to the possibilities of what could be in a fair trade deal. We only have to look at the co-operative movements. Even Starbucks sells fair trade coffee. I think the younger people growing up are getting a good education as to what fair trade is all about, as to opposed to "free trade".

Free trade is all about exploitation, multinational exploitation, essentially flooding, for example, the Colombia agricultural market with cheap agricultural products, displacing farmers who have been on the land for hundreds of years, putting them out of work, forcing them to go to cities where more problems are created and then they become dependent on foreign food.

How could that possibly be a good idea? The whole idea is to develop products in one's own environment and not import things. Trading is great. We cannot grow bananas in Manitoba, so we have to import those from somewhere. However, if we could grow them there, we should grow them there. We should be self-sufficient. Communities should be self-sufficient wherever they are and they should always strive for that.

We are certainly in favour of trade, but we want to have fair trade. We do not want to be flooding markets with cheap products, putting people out of work and ruining the environment in the process. When the environment is ruined and all of the damage is done to the environment, the companies simply walk away and let the government clean up the mess. That is great for investors. If they can buy shares at \$20.00, then they go up to \$100 and they can pocket the gains, I am sure they will support that type of economic activity. However, we in the House are supposed to think a little more deeply about the matter than simply holus-bolus rolling over and accepting what some corporate group wants us to do.

On that basis, the question is this. What do we mean by fair trade? We mean new trade rules and agreements to promote 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.

•(1655)

From my information, tomato farmers in Mexico were put out of work by the thousands when the free trade agreement was expanded to Mexico. Those workers are basically out of jobs. People are no longer able to support themselves on their farms, and they have to buy cheap imports.

How can we promote fair trade? We can promote it by making speeches in Parliament, but the best way is by educating the public to the elements of fair trade so they can in turn put pressure on their MPs and not grow up and develop the way government MPs have. To that extent, we will show some progress but it will take some time.

Government Orders

New trade agreements should encourage improvement in social, environmental and labour conditions rather than just minimize the damage of unrestricted trade. Federal and provincial procurement policies should stimulate Canadian industries by allowing governments to favour suppliers at home. Supply management boards and single desk marketers like the Canadian Wheat Board could help replace imports with domestic products and materials.

The Wheat Board has been under constant attack from the very beginnings of the Reform Party. The present government continues to take whacks at it. It seems the Wheat Board is one of the Conservatives' pet peeves, particularly if they get a majority government.

This is yet another reason why we should never allow the Conservatives to form a majority government. If the Conservatives had four years of a majority government, we would not recognize the country. That is why the public has not given them a majority government. The public will never give them a majority government because Canadians know, at the end of the day, that the Conservatives would do something they could not tolerate.

Another way to promote fair trade is by having local community and individual initiatives to buy fair trade imports and locally produced goods. We see local community and individual initiatives. People in my community are offering fair trade coffee. It causes people to think about this, and that is what we have to do.

If we cannot beat the Conservatives at the boardroom level, and I guess we will never be able to do that, or beat them in advertising, we will have to beat them on the streets. At the end of the day, that is what we will have to do.

Why fair trade and not free trade? Fair trade policies protect the environment by encouraging the use of domestically and locally produced goods. There is less freight, less fuel, less carbon. Why would we ship a product across the continent? It makes no sense to me to send truckloads of produce across the continent when the product can be produced locally.

The environment is a huge issue. Some companies hide behind free trade agreements. They can get into a jurisdiction and hide behind a structure that does not require them to take care of the environment. If they can use all sorts of pesticides without the proper controls, then they essentially gain in the long run because they make more money. At the end of the day, they pollute the environment and perhaps sell a product that is not as healthy as it should be.

Free trade policies, even those created with the environment in mind, do little to impede multinational corporations from polluting the environment, which I have already indicated.

Government Orders

● (1700)

The environmental side agreement of NAFTA, for example, has proven largely unenforceable, particularly when compared with other protections for industry and investors.

A system of fair trade can encourage the growth of Canadian jobs, both in quality and quantity. Fair competition rules and tougher labour standards will put Canadian industries on a level playing field with our trading partners and slow the international race to the bottom, which has resulted in the loss of Canadian manufacturing jobs. We have seen over and over again manufacturing jobs leaving North America and moving to other countries because of the “free trade” deals.

Free trade rules, on the other hand, have hurt Canadian job quality. Since 1989, most Canadian families have seen a decline in real income.

Fair trade can also protect labour rights by fostering the growth of workers' co-operatives and labour unions. Like the environmental side accord, the NAFTA labour agreement has gone mostly unenforced, giving industries that are willing to violate workers' rights incentives to relocate Canadian jobs. Fair trade policies which favour co-ops, unions and equitable pricing will protect workers in the developing world who might otherwise be exploited and take away reasons for Canadian producers to export the jobs. That is all part of rebalancing these agreements, making them more fair than where they are right now.

Fair trade rules will also protect societies and human rights around the globe. That is certainly the big issue we are dealing with in Bill C-2, the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, although not the only issue.

Although some predicted a human rights benefit from unrestricted free trade, and we heard that from the member for Kings—Hants over and over again, this has yet to be seen. In contrast, conflicts between locals and multinational corporations in such places as Peru become violent. A fair trade policy that aims for benefits for all parties can protect the most vulnerable from human rights abuses.

That is what it is all about. We have already dealt with this issue, with many people saying that this is a minor trade agreement in the whole scheme of things. I do not know why the government would drive it to the top of its agenda and have the Liberals roll over the way they have, but I guess they are used to that. This is tantamount to putting lipstick on a pig.

The member for Kings—Hants has dressed it all up and he is happy to go along with this, but members in his caucus are not so happy. I do not know how members will vote because the other day we saw two or three Liberals, as a matter of conscience, vote against their own motion and a number of others skipped the vote.

I really do not know what will happen with this vote because several members in the Liberal caucus will proudly vote with us in the NDP. Some members in that caucus will probably miss the vote because there is more to be gained by not being here or voting against than standing up and voting for it.

The previous leader of the Liberal Party and the previous critic had it right two years ago when they were on the international

relations committee. They opted for the review that we all wanted. What is wrong with a review? If there are no human rights abuses in Colombia, then why are they afraid of an independent human rights examination. If there are no abuses, it will pass with flying colours and we are on our way.

To have the Liberals simply change leaders and critics and flip their policy is very strange. It has certainly aided in the divisions that currently exist in the Liberal Party. The NDP Party will be happy to watch the drama unfold over the next few days and weeks to come.

● (1705)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my eloquent colleague from Elmwood—Transcona. I would like to ask him a question inspired by a press release from a coalition of Quebec organizations made up of the Comité pour les droits humains en Amérique latine, the Quebec Network on Continental Integration, the Conseil central du Montréal métropolitain CSN, the United Steelworkers, the Project Accompaniment and Solidarity Colombia, and Development and Peace, a Catholic organization.

These organizations commented on a recent report by the United Nations and Amnesty International about the escalating violence against indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, including murder and forcible displacement from communal lands to open them to agro-industrial activities and natural resource extraction.

The report also mentions that corruption and fraud are widespread among Colombian authorities. It states that currently, more than 60 members of congress have been charged or convicted or are under investigation for connections with paramilitary groups.

My question is this: Why should we believe that the Colombian government will enforce human rights, the free trade agreement and the investor protection provisions respectfully?

● (1710)

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. This is not just made up. It has been documented that the president and his family have been implicated in corruption and there have been charges. Why would the Liberals want to hop into bed to support a government like that?

The Uribe government is basically up for re-election right now. The president himself cannot run because he has finished two terms. The member for Kings—Hants says that the system works because the court decided that he could not run for the third term. The reality is that he simply got one of his henchmen in as his substitute. He has a replacement president that he supports.

Government Orders

The fact is that the Americans do not want to touch this. They are staying away. The Belgians and the Norwegians are staying away. Nobody wants to make the step, nobody except our government and the geniuses on the other side who are running the Liberal Party.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-sor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the collection of geniuses, otherwise known as the Mensa group over here, I would like to compliment the hon. member on his speech.

I do not want to raise some of the contentious issues that he raised but I do want to raise some of the points that he made about trade. Let us bear down on what is fundamental in a free trade agreement. It is to bring a nation in all aspects of labour and human rights on a course for economic opportunity and wealth.

He proposes that this particular situation does not fare well and, therefore, needs to be called off. However, many people here, and many experts would agree, and some from the country of Colombia are basically stating that this will bring them out of levels of poverty we have not seen before. They are saying that it will help them get above what they were before and will allow them to create a situation whereby the standards in their country will improve.

Is that not an example of fair trade to be pursued by this particular agreement?

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals were on the right track in the beginning when, in 2008, the House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade recommended that a human rights impact assessment be undertaken. That is all the committee was going to do and the Liberals supported that. That is all we are saying.

If there is an independent review being done and there are no abuses over there, as the member seems to suggest, then why are they afraid of the study? Why will they not let a human rights impact study be undertaken?

Nobody is saying that there will not be a trade agreement with Colombia in the future. We are just saying not now. We want Colombia to clean up the human rights abuses and let us have an independent body that says it is so.

I think, by all means, the United States, Canada and other countries will put them back on the list. However, there are a lot of other countries out there that are more worthy of a fair trade agreement right now than Colombia.

• (1715)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I like the idea that the bill is getting so much debate. I know the government is now hopping mad because it thinks it has had too much debate. These agreements are often dry and clinical because they are conceived by bureaucrats and put together in wordy documents. The fact that it is here in the House and that parliamentarians in Canada are fighting this bill in solidarity with the people of Colombia is something pretty important.

The member made some very good comments differentiating between free trade and fair trade. I think more and more people in Canada want to be proactive on the notion of fair trade and that we cannot separate trade from other issues of human rights, labour rights, environmental rights, social rights and social justice. Gone are

the days when these trade agreements can just be rammed through as the government thinks it can do.

I would like the member to elaborate on the fact that we now live in a different world where people are much more proactive about these agreements and are saying that they will not go through.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, I wish we could somehow teach this concept in the school system or have a way of getting the point across to Canadians because I know that Canadians watching the debates yesterday and today, by and large, would probably be well educated now in the bad human rights record of Colombia, but they might not be up to date about what constitutes a fair agreement.

I think people have an open mind and are willing to learn about this but it is a hard concept to explain in a media that is not receptive to the idea in the first place because we are always all about earning money. If it does not make top dollar, then it does not make top spot in the discussion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government keeps telling us that this free trade agreement contains side agreements on labour and the environment that are not part of the agreement itself. Apparently, these side agreements state that failure to comply with government standards or respect human rights can result in fines of up to \$15 million per year.

Once the maximum penalty has been reached, no further penalties can be imposed under the agreement. Companies will be able to flout environmental standards without risking their investments. The government will have no problem getting away with human rights violations. Fifteen million dollars is a drop in the bucket to mining companies that make billions of dollars in profits.

I would like my colleague to comment on that.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, our critic has called that provision “kill a trade unionist, pay a fine” because that is basically what it is. The government has said that if people are killed then it will put money into this fund but only up to \$15 million no matter how many people are killed. That is the wrong answer because the government should clean up the whole issue of human rights abuses in Colombia before it starts to promote and push an agreement like this.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am speaking in the House of Commons today to denounce Bill C-2, the implementation of the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement. There are many reasons why I disagree with this bill as it has been introduced by the Conservative government.

My colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé made some good points about human rights and spoke about the ineffectiveness of parallel agreements. In my speech I will touch on these issues as well.

Government Orders

For Quebeckers and the citizens of Vaudreuil-Soulanges, certain arguments have come to the forefront of this debate: environmental protection, respect for workers' rights and respect for the most fundamental human rights of the Colombian people.

I would like to explain why I am worried that Bill C-2 will pass. The Canadian government's main motivation is not trade. It is looking to make life easier for the Canadian investors, particularly in mining, who will invest in Colombia. The desire to protect Canadian investments abroad is legitimate. However, it seems obvious to me that this must not be done at the expense of the fundamental rights of Colombians.

I am worried that this agreement would be detrimental to the development of the people of Colombia. We must understand that increased trade should not be the government's only motivation. An agreement such as this must also contain provisions that allow us to establish a position of strength and, through negotiations, to work toward both implementing social measures that would benefit Colombians and establishing rules that respect the environment and laws that improve the living conditions of workers.

Judging by all the investment protection agreements Canada has signed over the years, the one that would bind Canada and Colombia seems ill conceived. All these agreements contain clauses that enable foreign investors to sue the local government if it takes measures that reduce the return on their investment.

To be more specific, we feel that these provisions could be harmful for a country where labour laws, environmental laws and respect for the people are uncertain at best. While attempting to protect our investments, the Canadian government is putting itself in a situation where it could increase the risk of delaying social and environmental progress in a country in great need of such progress.

I would like to point out that my colleague from Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher referred to some of the organizations that have reported on the situation in Colombia. I thank him for doing that. Colombia's human rights record is one of the worst in the world and certainly in Latin America.

The government of Colombia has the right to adopt, and should adopt, legislation to protect its environment and improve the quality of life of its people. We must determine whether it has the means to implement such measures and the means to fulfill its ambitions.

Yes, this regulation could cause companies that have invested in that country to lose some profits. We need to have some protection against nationalization without compensation, I do admit, but we also must include some provisions that will allow Canada to put pressure on the Colombian authorities.

The Bloc Québécois cannot support the implementation of the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement, as it stands.

Under no circumstances should the Canadian government swap its ability to pressure the Colombian government to respect human rights and protect the environment for guaranteed profits from investments by Canadian companies abroad.

I would point out that ratification of the U.S.-Colombia free trade agreement is also being delayed, particularly because they are trying

to clear up concerns over human rights abuses. It is a matter of justice.

I consulted a number of people in my riding of Vaudreuil-Soulanges. I cannot support the bill in its current form until Colombia brings in stricter legislation to protect minimum labour standards and the union movement, as well as stricter legislation to protect the environment.

The advantage of establishing a trade agreement with a country lies in the ability to develop a partnership with it. When economic barriers are reduced, trade between the two countries can increase. That is what one would hope to achieve with an agreement between Canada and Colombia. The likelihood of that happening in the near future is pretty low, though, considering the means being used.

• (1720)

When we look at the figures for imports and exports between Canada and Colombia, we can see that, not surprisingly, the vast majority of Canadian investments are in the excavating industry, specifically in mining. In 2007, imports in that sector accounted for nearly 31% of all imports from Colombia. In dollar figures, this represents almost \$138 million. Canada buys only primary commodities from Colombia. We import \$155 million worth of coffee, \$72 million worth of bananas and \$62 million worth of cut flowers. Adding agricultural and agri-food products brings the total to \$387 million. Foreign direct investment in Canada is approximately \$1 billion, while Canadian investment in Colombia is approximately \$1 billion.

Here are the aggregate trade data. In 2008, Canadian imports were rising and totalled \$644 million, as were Canadian exports, which totalled \$704 million. The pace of growth is quite varied, just as we predicted during the debate in the last session. In Quebec, imports amounted to \$88 million. That is a 0.5% decrease from 2007. Quebec imports into Colombia represented about 14% of Canada's total imports. Exports amounted to \$120 million in 2008 and accounted for about 17% of Canadian exports to Colombia. Quebec exports increased by a little less than 2% between 2007 and 2008.

Canada has other trading partners in Latin America and the Caribbean that rank higher than Colombia. In recent years, trade between Canada and the other Latin American countries has increased considerably, which has meant a smaller share of trade with Colombia than with other countries in the region.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) in Colombia is growing exponentially. To create a predictable environment and ensure that foreign investors will not be dispossessed of their property or have it nationalized without compensation, countries conclude treaties protecting investment. That is standard procedure and the Bloc Québécois is in favour of this kind of treaty.

The Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the United States had a chapter on protecting investment—chapter 16—and was the first agreement in the world to include a dispute settlement mechanism which both countries could use. The FTA worked very well. No cases of discriminatory measures against foreign investors were reported and none were taken to the arbitration panel. During the five years the FTA was in effect, the value of Canadian investments in the United States increased by 41%.

However, things went downhill with chapter 11 of NAFTA. By virtue of chapter 11 on investment, foreign investors can go directly to international courts, bypassing the filter of the public good that governments would apply. The concept of expropriation is so broad that any legislation that might have the effect of reducing an investor's profits can be interpreted as expropriation and give rise to a lawsuit. In addition, the amount of the suit is not limited to the amount of the investment and includes all potential future profits. It is completely abusive.

This chapter has been decried by everyone. As soon as legislation, for example to protect the environment, is passed and reduces a foreign investor's profits, the government is exposed to astronomical lawsuits. Over the years, Ottawa signed several bilateral agreements that basically copied chapter 11 of NAFTA. There was so much criticism, however, that the Liberals stopped signing these kinds of agreements. It is very hard to understand their about-face in this regard, and I hope they will review their position and vote against the present agreement.

Under the Conservatives, Ottawa returned to its old ways and negotiated many such agreements. In the case of Colombia, the Conservative government has ceded to multinationals the task of determining the common good.

The Bloc Québécois opposes the bill to implement the free trade agreement with Colombia because it contains clauses copied wholesale from chapter 11 of NAFTA. The Bloc wants the government to return to the previous approach used in treaties, which did not amount to a charter for the multinationals at the expense of the common good.

The displacement of communities is a serious problem in Colombia. There are several reasons for this human disaster, including internal conflicts within the government, paramilitary groups and guerrillas.

•(1725)

The arrival of extractive industries is also a major reason for forced migration.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

Private Members' Business

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

•(1730)

[*English*]

INCOME TAX ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-288, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (tax credit for new graduates working in designated regions), as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed without debate to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ) moved that the bill be concurred in at report stage.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps moved that the bill be read a third time and passed.

She said: Mr. Speaker, again we are gathered to debate Bill C-288, to give every new graduate who settles in a designated region a tax credit. This bodes well, because it means the bill has passed committee stage.

In 2007, my colleague the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord introduced a similar bill, namely Bill C-207. It received support from a majority of the members in the House at all stages and even got as far as the Senate. I promise my colleague, young people and the regions of Quebec to have the same determination to get this bill passed.

To put this into context, the purpose of Bill C-288 is to give a tax credit to every new graduate who settles in a designated region. Since being introduced in the House, this bill has come a long way and has received a great deal of support.

Bill C-288 is supported by a variety of groups and generations throughout Quebec: the Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec, or FECQ, and the Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec, or FEUQ, which represent 40,000 and 125,000 students respectively in Quebec; the FADOQ network, which has 255,000 members, and the Fédération québécoise des municipalités, which represents 972 municipalities. They have all given their full support to the bill. What is more, the bill is supported by a number of RCMs, chambers of commerce and youth employment centres.

Private Members' Business

In addition to this sizeable support, last November the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord and I delivered 3,000 postcards in support of Bill C-288 to the office of the hon. member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean. Contrary to what some people have suggested, these postcards were indeed signed by people who are affected by the bill.

Before going any further, I would like to thank two colleagues: the hon. member for Honoré-Mercier and the hon. member for Churchill who have been behind Bill C-288 from the beginning.

I would also like to thank the representatives of the Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec who came to show their strong support for Bill C-288 by testifying before the Standing Committee on Finance. I greatly value their support because, in a way, this bill is designed for the thousands of students and graduates who will move out of large urban centres to go live and work in the regions.

The main purpose of this bill is to attract young graduates to the regions in order to help solve two main problems: the exodus of young people and the serious shortage of skilled labour. It is important to encourage young graduates to settle in the regions, where they will start their professional careers, and to recruit skilled labour for the benefit of the regions.

The exodus of young people is becoming increasingly problematic in terms of the economic vitality of areas that are far from large centres. These areas need young graduates in order to develop and to enhance their ability to innovate. Obviously, giving recent graduates who settle in regions a tax credit of \$3,000 per year—up to a three-year maximum of \$8,000—would help revive local economies and meet labour needs.

The exodus of young people has a negative impact, both socially and economically, on any region. It speeds up population aging and reduces the average education level of the people left behind, which undermines the region's ability to innovate. The more remote regions are losing the most residents. In many cases, they depend on one type of industry; these are called single-industry regions.

Gone are the days when resource regions could prosper based solely on extracting natural resources for primary processing elsewhere. In order to grow, the regions will have to look to technology and develop their processing industry more.

Quebec was hard hit by the forestry crisis. Since 2005, Quebec has lost 26,000 jobs in the forestry industry alone, that is, the industry and related services, such as transportation and logging equipment. This represents 50% of Canada's total loss.

• (1735)

Since the Conservatives came to power, about a third of all forestry jobs have disappeared. Some regions have been decimated. Since the summer of 2004, my region, the Upper Laurentians, which has been hardest hit by the crisis, has lost 58% of all forestry jobs in Quebec.

Of the 17 forestry companies in my riding, 14 have been forced to close their doors. Heavy machinery operators, engineers, technicians and truckers have borne the brunt of these job losses. Those with higher levels of education, special skills and expertise, such as

engineers, have been forced to leave our beautiful region to find work in their fields.

The Government of Quebec realized that to promote regional economic diversification, it would have to develop new business opportunities in other fields.

This is a major hindrance to the development of secondary industry and high-tech. In all of the studies that have been done, many companies have said they would only be able to stay in their region if they did not grow very much. So long as businesses stay small, they can take care of professional and technical work themselves. If they grow, they have to hire skilled workers. Difficulty finding such workers in the regions might force companies to relocate to urban centres, where they are more likely to find qualified workers.

Bill C-288 proposes a beneficial tax measure for all young eligible graduates in Quebec and Canada. Quebec is not the only province experiencing a youth exodus. Across Canada, economic activity has gradually moved from more rural regions to larger centres. Some provinces—Quebec, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Manitoba—have introduced a graduate tax credit. The Quebec government introduced its credit in 2003, then amended it, so that it now resembles the tax credit proposed in Bill C-288, which I am talking about today.

The Conservatives tried to derail the debate on this bill by grossly inflating the cost of the program. In his November 24 report, the Parliamentary Budget Officer assessed the proposal according to a number of different scenarios. I would like to clarify some of the data so that members can focus on the essence of the bill.

First, the regions designated in this bill will be determined by the Minister of Finance, after consulting with the provinces involved. Second, the regions will not be designated based on the number of people who would be affected; they will be based on the needs identified in these regions far from Canada's major cities. I should point out that the bill excludes metropolitan regions with more than 200,000 residents. Third, the bill must focus on resource regions and regions with low rates of urbanization that are struggling with long-term unemployment rates, an indicator of poor employment prospects.

Finally, we used economic and health regions as geographic criteria. We then used the long-term unemployment rate to determine the regions where job prospects are more difficult—4.7% and up in 2006. From these regions, we considered only the regions that had over 12% of their population living in rural areas.

In total, we identified 34 health regions that met these criteria, representing 8.24% of the Canadian population. According to the estimates of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, such a measure would cost around \$230 million per year, rather than the \$600 million claimed by the Conservatives.

Of course, other regions could be added during the discussions between the federal government and the provincial governments, but these regions will have to meet the requirements of the bill, and have a high long-term unemployment rate, combined with a low rate of urbanization or a low population density.

• (1740)

Adding a few regions that meet the above criteria would not substantially increase the cost of the bill.

We still want the support of Liberal and NDP members for this Bloc Québécois initiative. We hope that Conservative members will put aside their partisan ideology and act in the interests of young graduates and the regions.

I believe that many young people who are about to complete their post-secondary education or professional training are waiting for this bill to pass. A number of my colleagues have probably had exploratory visits from young graduates. These young people are in contact with community stakeholders, the decision-makers, and are in a position to determine the regions' needs and to tell us what kind of labour force is needed in our regions to develop secondary and tertiary processing.

The bill creates many expectations. It provides an incentive for attracting youth back to the regions. However, young people who are interested in returning are also interested in the quality of life they may find there. A young person who moves to the region may start a family. Families add vitality to a region.

As I stated earlier, this time I hope that the Conservative members, especially those from Quebec—in particular the members for Pontiac, Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean and Jonquière—Alma—as well as the independent member from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier will understand that they must put their regions' interests ahead of their party's interests in order to support all regions of Quebec and their young people.

[English]

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am on the finance committee that reviewed the bill that is before us and I take some exception to the characterization that this is partisan. I really want to encourage our colleagues from the other parties to really look at this.

My question for the sponsor of the bill is, how does she consider the bill fair? Does she not believe in fairness in the tax system, where we compare students who happen to be from an area that has over 200,000 people to those students who are from areas that do not have 200,000 people? How is the Canadian tax system fair when we give a tax bonus to students beginning their careers just because they are from a larger urban centre than those who are not?

• (1745)

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Speaker, I see we are facing extremely different points of view. I do not understand. We are not talking about unfairness. Bill C-288 is designed specifically to encourage young people—who usually have to go to urban centres for training or study purposes—to return to the regions if they wish.

Private Members' Business

The regions of Quebec are at a crossroads. Indeed, several regions have been hit hard by the forestry crisis. I said in my speech that several regions still depend on a single industry, and I used my region as an example, because that is the case there. If we want to develop secondary and tertiary processing, we need to have a skilled labour force. In order to have a skilled labour force, young people must return to the regions. But young people who go to urban centres develop a network of friends and might be tempted to stay in those urban centres instead of returning home, knowing they will not find work there.

This is an incentive. This does not affect other options, other credits that young people can benefit from. This is an additional measure, nothing more, but one that will encourage young people to return to the regions.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech and for having introduced this bill, which is now in its third reading.

In my riding of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, there are many rural communities. The fact that many of the youth decide to move to larger cities poses a huge problem. By studying this bill closely and supporting it, we can ensure that our communities will survive and we can offer more opportunities to youth.

This bill is not about equality, as the Conservative member said. It aims to fix a problem that rural areas are facing.

I would like to ask my colleague to speak more about the youth who need to stay in or come back to their communities.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Speaker, I thank my NDP colleague. I told her that I was very pleased to hear where she lives. I have family members, the Deschamps, living in Kapuskasing. I should not be saying my name, but I wanted to say hello to them.

I imagine that the economic development of her region is important to my colleague. In fact, we are not reinventing the wheel. A number of provinces have this type of incentive or tax credit, and many young people take advantage of it.

It is quite normal for a worker who pays provincial and federal taxes to benefit from such a credit. It is not unusual to return a portion of the taxes they pay to taxpayers.

[English]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me start by acknowledging my friend and colleague across the way, the member for Laurentides—Labelle. I have the greatest respect for this individual, and I am sure her original intent was very appropriate. We are all concerned about education and getting our young people to work.

Unfortunately, this bill misses the mark drastically. I stand once again to plead with this House to recognize the many problems and tremendous cost of this proposal and suggest that we must defeat it.

Private Members' Business

Let us be clear. This proposal is very bad policy. It would grant preferential and unfair tax treatment by way of a special tax credit to a chosen few graduates. These graduates would need to reside in an ill-defined and allegedly economically depressed designated region and take up vague, qualifying employment for a limited period.

Let me put in a very quick example. Just this afternoon we have done a little research on this and we find that within the parameters, even with this vague amendment, Fort McMurray qualifies as an economically depressed region.

I am sure the member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca would stand and vociferously argue that, simply because Fort McMurray's population is 65,000 people. I am sure members know the wage structure in that community. Truck drivers bring home over \$100,000 a year. Somehow this is not making sense. That is why we need to defeat this bill at this stage.

For the record, our Conservative members at finance committee fought to have a thorough study of this flawed proposal. We suggested we should wait and hear from the witnesses at committee to help identify the countless deficiencies in this. Unfortunately the opposition did not agree.

As a result, with only two short hearings and some minor tinkering, a Bloc-NDP-Liberal coalition, and where have we heard that before, of committee members adopted this approximately \$0.5-billion proposal. However, in that brief hearing we did get the opportunity to have the Parliamentary Budget Officer appear before the committee.

Conservative members of the committee had requested in advance that the Parliamentary Budget Officer cost this proposal. That is one of his mandates. We were happy to see him step forward and do that.

In his report, the Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed what we as the government have been saying along, that this is a costly proposal. Let me quote directly from the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report:

Overall, assuming no behavioural change on the part of graduates and based on the foregoing assumptions, these ranges suggest that at full phase-in the program could have a cost estimate of between over one hundred million to approximately six hundred million per annum.

Let me repeat, \$600 million per year. Over the course of 10 years alone, that would be a cost of about \$6 billion. All that and "assuming no behavioural change on the part of graduates".

That is a \$6-billion proposal that could very likely be even more expensive than what we are actually debating here today. The alleged merits of the proposal aside, which are certainly in doubt, I ask through you, Mr. Speaker, how the Bloc member and her party might be thinking that we would pay this \$6 billion. What programs would they eliminate? Would they cut transfers to provinces? What taxes would they raise? Or would they pay for it at all?

Unfortunately we have no answers to these questions because we did not have time to pursue it properly at committee.

I will share with my colleagues in the House who had questions as well and who suggested the finance committee ask more questions of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. Let us read from the report released this past November:

Given the sensitivity of the tax credit's estimated cost to the size and number of the designated regions, Committee members may wish to further refine this proposal to set policy boundaries around key cost drivers.

● (1750)

Unfortunately, as I indicated earlier, that did not happen. If the Bloc-NDP-Liberal coalition on the finance committee had looked a little more closely at this flawed proposal, it would have understood why it raised so many concerns.

First, this proposal would basically provide preferential and unfair tax treatment to literally any recent post-secondary graduate working in a designated region. This would happen regardless of whether there were a surplus or a shortage of workers with that skill.

The proposal makes weak assurances that a graduate's work should somewhat relate to their training, but does not specify on what basis this would be determined. For example, any graduate could claim that his or her employment made use of the general problem-solving skills acquired at school.

Second, the list of designated regions expressly referenced in this proposal has not been updated or revised in close to three decades. Even with the minor tinkering I had mentioned, that would mean the entire province of Saskatchewan would be one of these designated regions, excluding Regina and Saskatoon of course. It would be classified as an economically depressed and designated region. I know one member of our committee, the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, would be quite offended by that. In fact I believe she was. This would be comical if it were not carrying a \$6 billion cost.

I am at a loss as to how anyone would imply that Saskatchewan is currently a depressed region. In February 2010 Saskatchewan had an unemployment rate of 4.3%, nearly half the current national average of 8.2%. What is more, according to CIBC World Markets, Saskatchewan will lead other Canadian provinces in economic growth this year, well ahead of Canada's overall projected growth.

CIBC economist Warren Lovely said:

Oil, potash, agriculture and uranium sectors are again in demand, with ongoing development paving the way for production increases. Expect Saskatchewan to lead all provinces in 2010...

Yet this Bloc proposal would characterize Saskatchewan as largely having limited employment opportunities. It would give those workers in booming Saskatchewan a preferential tax treatment. How is that fair? Why would we provide preferential tax treatment for select new graduates but nothing for others?

Private Members' Business

For example, a new graduate working in Saskatchewan in a designated region and earning around \$33,700 would not pay a penny of federal tax for three years. Alternatively, a new graduate working outside these ill-defined designated regions, everywhere from Winnipeg, Halifax, Windsor, Toronto, Montreal, Calgary and more, would pay nearly \$3,000 per year in federal income tax. Again this is a deeply flawed and poorly thought out proposal.

Third, there is no guarantee that new graduates attracted to a designated region would remain there once their eligibility for the credit expired. It would encourage young workers to make employment decisions based on temporary, preferential and unfair tax treatment, rather than seek their best opportunities for employment, in other words, where their skills best meet the demand.

On the other hand, a large number of new graduates who are currently choosing to freely work in designated regions without this special tax credit would be provided preferential tax treatment for little or no compelling reason.

Clearly the problems with this proposal are critical. The cost is astronomical, as high as \$6 billion in the first 10 years alone, and as the Parliamentary Budget Officer noted, that is assuming no behavioural change on the part of graduates.

• (1755)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to debate Bill C-288, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (tax credit for new graduates working in designated regions).

As the vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Finance for several years now, I want to point out that our committee has studied this bill many times. The committee has been through numerous consultations and amendments other than those mentioned by the parliamentary secretary, and I believe we have achieved a state of near-perfection.

• (1800)

[*English*]

Though this bill is somewhat imperfect, that is the case with most private members' bills in this place. It is no fault of anyone's, but with the private members' bills that are brought forward, there will be some imperfections because of the limited resources we have as individual members of Parliament. We are not the government. We do not have the bureaucracy behind us, so some of the bills are limited in terms of detail. We have to try to work those details out. That is the reason we send these bills to committee.

However I feel the bill does address a crucial area of the Canadian economy that the Conservative government has chosen to ignore.

The parliamentary secretary spoke about what happened in committee. The government could have taken steps to propose better legislation. It could have tabled legislation using all the resources of the government to address this issue. It could have tabled a more complete bill, a bill that would have considered the needs of regions, that would have tied regional development, along with job creation, innovation, which we have been talking about, and

green technologies, to consider the needs of students and their employment futures.

Instead the government decided to shut down Parliament and go on vacation for a couple of months and came back with nothing more than a vision to change the national anthem.

Given the failure of the Conservatives to work for all Canadians, I think at this point Bill C-288 is the best option we have on the table.

[*Translation*]

To ensure a prosperous national economy, wealth must come not only from big cities. We need a broad range of skills and professions in all regions of our great country. As the member for a Montreal Island riding, I am acutely aware of the challenges facing people who live in the regions. I want to talk about the labour shortage, the high cost of transportation, the lack of public transit and other huge challenges for those who live in the regions.

Those are just some of the reasons I support this bill.

[*English*]

The failure of the government to propose long-term solutions to strengthen the economies of our smaller regions has led to entire communities being left behind. The costs associated with regional economic failure are too great to completely catalogue in the short time permitted for me today.

Of course these include the stagnation of economic development and growth in smaller communities, the breakup of communities as the most capable of the young people migrate elsewhere, the departure of industries as the local talent pool dries up, and increased burdens on the EI system as unemployment in the region increases.

These students sometimes not only move away from the regions into the cities but they also move away from the cities to other places and to other countries.

[*Translation*]

Bill C-288 introduces a tax credit for young graduates who settle in one of the geographic regions listed in the Regional Development Incentives Act to take up work in their field.

The tax credit can be anywhere from \$200 to \$750, which is a substantial amount to students who have recently completed their studies and earned their degrees and are ready to work. I do not think this measure will bankrupt the government. That kind of money will not hinder economic growth. In fact, these graduates can work in the regions and create still more jobs.

Even if they want to return to their hometowns, many new graduates cannot because they have student loans and simply cannot work for the typically lower salaries offered in the regions.

This bill would encourage many Canadians to return to their home regions after completing their studies. It would enable new graduates to benefit from a tax credit equal to 40% of their salary, up to \$8,000. That is one of the things we asked for when the bill was referred to the committee.

Private Members' Business

The Bloc proposed an \$8,000 tax credit. I proposed that that amount be spread over three years, in order to prevent students from returning for just one year to take advantage of the tax credit and then moving somewhere else.

The committee decided to introduce an initial amendment to spread the \$8,000 over three years: for example, \$3,000 the first year, \$3,000 the second year and \$2,000 the third year. That way, young people will stay for 12, 24 or 36 months or longer after they get their first job.

[English]

This would provide young graduates who want to ply their trades back home an adequate financial reason to do so, and at minimal cost. The provincial government in Quebec has already instituted a measure similar to the one proposed in Bill C-288 and it has been quite successful so far.

While the bill has much potential, we also talked about costs. We have had all kinds of costs and that is why the Liberals introduced an amendment that would be applicable to communities of 200,000 and less. We had a cost of \$600 million and I think the Bloc came up with \$160 million. We are comfortable with \$160 million, so we in the Liberal Party are ready to support that.

• (1805)

[Translation]

Liberal members of the Standing Committee on Finance proposed an amendment that was approved by the member who had originally introduced the bill. That amendment ensures that the bill targets rural regions in particular, by excluding students who move to cities with a population of more than 200,000. Thus, the bill will achieve its goal, while ensuring that the cost of implementing it will be relatively low.

[English]

This amendment would ensure that the tax credit is extended only to those students who choose to settle in truly small communities, not as the member opposite, the parliamentary secretary, just suggested. Thus it helps the bill better achieve its stated goal while minimizing the costs associated with implementing the bill.

In committee we try to improve some of these bills, but the Conservatives did not help or make any suggestions when in fact we did try to work out regions or areas where this bill would be applicable. Hopefully, places like Fort McMurray would not be one of those areas, but if there was all of a sudden—

Mr. Alan Tonks: A downturn.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: —a downturn in the Fort McMurray area, the MP for Fort McMurray would be more than happy that we went ahead and passed this bill into law.

The Liberal Party believes that the federal government can significantly impact regional economic development. That is why in 2005 the Liberal government at the time invested over \$800 million over five years in regional development agencies across the country.

[Translation]

What is interesting is that the Bloc Québécois was the only party that voted against Bill C-9 in 2005, which aimed to create the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec.

[English]

The Parliamentary Budget Officer, Mr. Kevin Page, has testified before the finance committee and assured us that the Canada Revenue Agency has the capability to implement these changes and administer them quite easily. The bill does not actually do much to promote significant job growth in the regions, but it is a beginning. So we should not lose sight of the fact that it could help to stop the bleeding in regions where jobs are available but are not being filled because of the regional geographic disadvantage.

[Translation]

Given that this government has no real strategy to promote the economic growth of the regions, this bill is a good option.

I believe that all members of this House should support it. Personally, I will support it.

[English]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin my deliberation on Bill C-288 by setting the stage. I was born in a town called Thompson, Manitoba, a town of 15,000 people. Like most of the people I went to school with who chose to pursue post-secondary education, I had to leave my home community. The closest place I could achieve a post-secondary education and follow my educational path was 800 kilometres away in Winnipeg.

Hundreds of young people leave my community and communities like mine every year. Most of them do not come back. They do not come back because they go to a place to get an education and they put down roots there, whether by meeting other people, establishing a family, finding a job or liking where they are. I was one of the few who decided to come back because it was important to me to come back to give voice to the exact issues we in northern and rural Canada face: The bleeding of our population and of young people leaving to pursue opportunities that might not be supported in our region; and the challenges that we face in accessing services that Canadians in urban centres take for granted, whether health care, child care, infrastructure, recreation or basic services that so many Canadians have in abundance in urban centres.

For me and my party this bill is about responding to one of the biggest challenges that rural Canada faces, which is about losing that capital, losing that most valuable resource, our young people, that human resource which allows our communities to continue to exist, to build and prosper into the future.

Private Members' Business

The bill is fundamentally about investing in rural Canada, and as the rural and community development critic for the NDP, I am proud to stand here to say that we are supporting our colleagues in the Bloc Québécois and are certainly glad to see the cooperation of the Liberal Party. I am very dismayed to see the position of the Conservative Party, a party that claims to represent rural Canada and that in fact has members of Parliament that span, certainly, the prairie region. When it comes to a bill that looks to respond fundamentally to one of the biggest challenges we face, not only are the Conservatives not supporting the bill but they are also criticizing it, this innovative step that goes to the core of encouraging the retention of young people in our rural communities. Many of their constituents would be dismayed to hear that as well.

This investment in rural Canada is a beginning and ought to be one step in a broader strategy on how we continue to build our country. Many people talk about how urbanization is the new wave and that we have so many people not simply coming from rural Canada, but also others moving from other urban centres and people immigrating to Canada, all of whom are increasingly going to urban centres.

While that may be true, rural communities still exist. Rural communities exist because people have laid roots there and because some of the most fundamental economic drivers in Canada are based there. Resource extraction, whether mining, oil and gas, or the minerals found in soil, and forestry are based in rural Canada. So much of what our economy depends on comes from rural Canada, and without people living in these communities, that extraction, that economic driver, would not exist.

What we need to be looking at are steps to invest in our rural communities. Looking at encouraging young people to come back is a key step. This needs to be followed by other steps that we in the NDP have been fighting for for quite some time, and that certainly are based on the fundamental values that our party was built on, in terms of investment in health care, for example.

● (1810)

The disparities between health care services in rural Canada and urban Canada are shocking. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities published a report in 2009 that discussed how quality of life in rural Canada was less than in urban Canada, which is unacceptable. One of the main ways in which it is worse is health care.

I am saddened to stand here and say that I do not have a family doctor, like so many people in my community and my region. We have fewer doctors compared with our population needs. We have less ability to access services, and certainly when it comes to acute care and specialized services.

We also do not have child care. We have fewer child care spaces than many urban centres have per population. Many young people want to make a go and stay in their communities and work in the industries that exist around them, but without those child care spaces many of them, particularly women, cannot pursue their chosen paths.

We also have substandard transportation infrastructure in my region. I rose in this House last week to talk about how I represent communities that do not have all-weather roads. In the year 2010, I

represent 22 communities that do not have an all-weather road, not because they cannot have one, but because the federal government has not partnered and not been part of an innovative strategy to look at that. I am pleased to hear it has heeded the calls from the province and, certainly, at the federal level, from advocates, to look at solution around all-weather roads. I hope we will be looking at this in the very near future.

Moreover, there is the issue of recreational infrastructure, looking again at the fundamental question of the quality of life and at the need for basic services that keep people in their communities and keep them healthy and, in general, allow these communities to grow in a much better way.

Bill C-288 is part of that step and the reinvestments that we need to be seeing in rural Canada.

I would like to respond to some of the claims that I heard from the governing side today and on other occasions.

Someone commented that this undertaking would be too expensive. Speaking of offensive, I think that statement is offensive, to use that same language. It seems to me that many investments in rural Canada would be seen as being too expensive. It is too far away and there are not enough people, et cetera.

A couple of weeks ago, we saw quite a substantial flip-flop by the Minister of Industry. Organizations in my riding and across Canada were told that the community access program, which allows them to access the Internet, which many Canadians take for granted, was going to be cut. A senior's organization, The Pas Golden Age Group in Manitoba, was told that it would no longer receive money to invest in accessing the Internet. Yet after substantial pressure, and I am sure significant pressure from its own constituents, the government turned around.

Was the initial claim correct that it was too expensive to invest in something as fundamental as Internet service in rural Canada? Once the Conservatives heard the voice of reason and how fundamental this was, it seems the government realized quite abruptly that a change of course was needed.

We certainly hope that similar sentiments will be applied to this bill, in recognition that this is key to way we look at building our rural communities and the future of our country.

The other statement that really struck me was the reference to certain regions being economically depressed. What is offensive about being called economically depressed?

I come from a mining community, and I know communities where generation after generation people have given everything for the benefit of not just their community and the company there, but also for their country. We need to turn around the language where people say that Fort McMurray or some other region in Saskatchewan might be seen as economically depressed. We need to change that language because in these communities we need to be looking at alternatives. We need to look at ways of supporting the diversification of those economies and at other opportunities, rather than letting people who have given everything to our country suffer.

Private Members' Business

●(1815)

One step in that support for rural Canada as it builds to the future, despite the economic situation, would be to support this bill. It is a bill that gives back and gives to the future of Canada's rural and northern young people.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to once again thank the hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle for introducing and vigorously defending the bill which, as we all know, had reached the Senate before the October 2008 election was called. I am also taking this opportunity to thank Liberal members who have spoken so far, whether to address the first bill, namely Bill C-207, or this one, Bill C-288. I also want to thank NDP members.

The tax credit is for a graduate who, in the 24-month period that follows the date on which he successfully completed his studies, begins to hold a job in his area of specialization, in a region that is facing economic and demographic difficulties. The bill provides for a tax credit of up to a maximum of \$8,000 to a young graduate, for a minimum of three years.

The purpose of this legislation is to curb the exodus of young graduates towards large urban centres, to encourage them to settle in regions to undertake their professional career, and to hire, for the regions' benefit, a skilled workforce.

The tax credit applies to an individual who, in the 24-month period that follows the date on which he successfully completed studies leading to the awarding of a recognized diploma, begins to hold a job in his area of specialization, in a designated region where he is going to settle.

At second reading, some members pointed out that the bill should be complemented by a comprehensive regional development plan. I certainly agree with this view, but Bill C-288 is a first step that will allow our regions and our regional businesses to hire and keep a skilled workforce.

I am very grateful to all those who have expressed their support here for this legislation, and to those who came to support us at various events, including the Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec (FEUQ), the Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec (FECQ), the Fédération de l'âge d'or du Québec (FADOQ), the Liberal member for Honoré-Mercier, and the NDP member for Churchill, who were present at the press conference organized by the Bloc Québécois to support these measures. All these stakeholders expressed their support for this concrete and effective incentive, which consist in giving a tax credit to young graduates who settle in a designated region to work there.

A similar tax credit implemented by the Quebec government has proven its worth. The program was established in 2003, which means that it is almost in its eighth year. It helps new graduates settle in resource regions, the description used by the Government of Quebec. In the first year of the program, 2,000 young people applied for the tax credit; this number has since risen to 9,000. Some regions are beginning to feel the positive effects of this program. In my region, in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, migration is still negative but has almost reached zero.

Therefore, I am asking the members of this House to help our rural areas and to help our regions experiencing economic difficulties and losing population by supporting our youth. We must stop the population drain and the exodus of youth. These are two important issues in our regions. We must help develop processing industries by providing our businesses with access to the skilled labour force they need.

●(1820)

No one in the House would be surprised to hear me say that the regions of Quebec, and a number of regions in other Canadian provinces, are at the end of their rope and have been since long before the economic crisis. I am thinking about northern Ontario and British Columbia, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador and Prince Edward Island. Several parts of these regions have been hurting for years. It goes without saying that a tax credit to encourage young people to settle or even stay in a region would be greatly beneficial.

Our regions are going through a real crisis and the Conservative government is not paying any attention. I hope that this time the members opposite will have a little more humility and sensitivity and listen to the cry for help coming from the regions and the young people who live there.

I am especially disappointed in the Conservative members from Quebec and even more so in the two ministers from my region of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, who are very familiar with this measure that was implemented by the Government of Quebec in 2003, as I was saying earlier.

Again, I am calling on the Conservative members from Quebec, more specifically the hon. members for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean and for Jonquière—Alma who, I repeat, are well aware of the importance of and benefits derived from this legislation and this program, to pass along the message within their caucus about the positive aspects of such a measure.

For those members who do not realize, the Government of Quebec is not the only one that has adopted such programs. The Saskatchewan provincial government has had a similar program for a few years, which gives a credit of up to \$20,000 over a period of seven years.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer's report mentions five Canadian provinces—Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Manitoba and Saskatchewan—that have introduced incentive measures to attract young people to regions that are experiencing economic difficulties or that are losing young people.

The bill addresses a very serious problem. Many regions are in a period of economic distress, which of course is only increasing the trend of youth out-migration. Indeed, the further we go from the main centres, the more the population is declining. Quebec, like Saskatchewan, has taken measures to stem the tide. As I mentioned earlier, other Canadian provinces have adopted incentive measures.

Adjournment Proceedings

The exodus of youth and the depopulation of the regions are not new phenomena. However, for decades, they were offset by high birth rates. With the drastic decline in the birth rate, the challenge today is to keep these young people in the regions and to attract others to come and settle there. Time is of the essence because the trend has continued since the 1990s and the situation is worsening in several areas of Quebec and Canada.

At present, the population is declining in 6 of the 17 administrative regions in Quebec, including the Lower St. Lawrence, the North Shore, Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, Gaspé and Mauricie. The regions need young people, especially skilled young people. With youth out-migration, the population ages faster and regions become less vital. The exodus of skilled individuals reduces the average education level of the people left behind, which undermines regions' ability to innovate. These factors affect the potential for development and could send the regions into a downward spiral that will ultimately destroy them. It is a downward spiral that cannot be stopped.

The shortage of skilled workers in the regions is not solely a matter of training. In fact, the young people from the regions are no less educated than those in the big cities. The problem is rather that young people from the regions do not live there any more. There is an out-migration of young people and skilled workers.

•(1825)

I would like to remind the members of the House that when the Standing Committee on Finance studied this bill, an amendment was added to ensure that this program was truly directed to the regions. Metropolitan regions with a population of more than 200,000 are excluded.

I would like each member of the House, particularly those in the Conservative Party, to take the time to study this bill closely so that they can see the positives in this measure that would help the regions and young people.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time provided for private members' business has 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.

•(1830)

[English]

INDUSTRY

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to continue the NDP's attempt to get answers from the industry minister on the issue of FedNor.

It seems the minister does not think northerners get it, but they do. They understand perfectly that FedNor is an in-house economic development program situated within the industry department and completely under the control of the industry minister.

Last week at the industry committee meeting, the minister's contempt and ignorance of what matters to northerners was in full display once again. Here is what the minister said about FedNor being an accountable, transparent, independent agency: "They don't care whether it's a stand-alone agency or it's a division of this or that or whether it's a director or a captain or whether we call the executive director of FedNor the Queen of Sheba. It doesn't matter". It does matter.

Northerners understand that the four independent regional economic departments are not subject to ministerial interference. Rather, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Western Economic Diversification Canada, Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, and the Southern Ontario Development Agency, SODA, are all stand-alone agencies with budgets and reporting obligations to Parliament.

The minister cannot have it both ways. He cannot defend and promote the other economic agencies in those regions and then in the same breath tell northerners they do not deserve their own stand-alone agency. That is simply unacceptable. It is also an insult to our communities.

The minister loves to jab the Liberals in the eye with the fact that they have only one seat left in northern Ontario because of their neglect of our region when they were in government. However, I want to point out to the minister that his party is not doing any better for precisely the same reason.

I am proud of the hard work being done by northern New Democrat MPs on behalf of our region. Our team will not let up on the current government until it gives our communities what they deserve: a stand-alone agency equal to those in other deserving regions of Canada. Nothing less will do.

We do not want the Queen of Sheba. We do not want clowns and jugglers. We do not want decisions made in Toronto and Ottawa alone. We want an accountable agency situated in northern Ontario, with decisions being made by northern Ontarians. I do not believe that is too much to ask and his government knows that. It has simply chosen to turn a blind eye to this inequality. I can assure members that northerners will hold the government accountable.

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, allow me to speak a little bit and highlight the great news for Canadians living in northern Ontario. I would also like to correct, if I could, some unfortunate misinformation that is being circulated about the future of FedNor.

Canada has returned to economic growth following the deepest economic recession since the 1930s. Budget 2010 aims to contribute to this recovery and sustain Canada's economic advantage now and for the future. It will do this by continuing to deliver on commitments outlined in Canada's economic action plan, by investing in a limited number of new targeted initiatives to build jobs and growth for the economy of tomorrow and by returning to budgetary balance once the economy has recovered.

Adjournment Proceedings

However, it seems that some of my honourable colleagues in the opposition are choosing to ignore the very real positive results we are achieving for those in northern Ontario and are instead focusing on gossip. Recently, rumours about changes to FedNor have been spread recklessly, creating uncertainty in northern Ontario communities and anxiety among the dedicated staff at FedNor. I do not understand why or on what basis these rumours have started.

Budget 2010 does not affect FedNor. Its budget remains untouched. Let me be very clear, FedNor will continue to operate at full capacity in northern Ontario, and will continue to deliver programs as it has for municipalities, businesses and entrepreneurs all across the region.

Four years ago the minister announced that the Government of Canada was providing FedNor, for the first time in the organization's history, with stable ongoing five-year funding. This unprecedented funding commitment has allowed FedNor to develop and implement longer term planning, and has helped the organization deliver for the people of northern Ontario.

Since then, FedNor has invested more than \$209 million in over 1,000 projects to benefit northern Ontario's economy. In addition, this government has made major investments in northern Ontario through our economic action plan, such as \$31.4 million under the community adjustment fund, \$25.2 million under the recreational infrastructure Canada initiative, and \$36.6 million that has gone to improve infrastructure at northern Ontario institutions through the knowledge infrastructure program.

In conclusion, let me reassure my esteemed colleague that our commitment to FedNor and indeed our commitment to the economic well-being of northern Ontario has never been stronger.

• (1835)

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, that is great news coming from the other side of the House, but there is one thing missing, an independent FedNor, a FedNor that is independent from the minister's interference similar to what exists in Atlantic Canada, Quebec, western Canada, and southern Ontario. All we want is for FedNor to be independent. We want the bureaucrats in FedNor to make the decisions for FedNor, for the people of northern Ontario.

Right now the bureaucrats at FedNor make decisions and send them on to the minister, and then they sit on the minister's desk for weeks or for months. That is not acceptable. The infrastructure is there right now. It would not cost the government any more money. FedNor is there. All we want is for FedNor to make its own decisions.

Mr. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, I cannot say this with any more conviction or clarity. This government stands fully behind the people of northern Ontario.

I named a couple of initiatives that the government had funded. I mentioned, of course, that FedNor, for the first time in the organization's history, has stable ongoing five-year funding thanks to this government. I mentioned that FedNor has invested more than \$209 million in over 1,000 projects to benefit northern Ontario's economy. I mentioned \$31.4 million under the community adjustment fund, \$25.2 million under the recreational infrastructure Canada initiative, and \$36.6 million gone to improve infrastructure

at northern Ontario institutions through the knowledge infrastructure program.

The one thing that all of these investments have in common, the one thing that has continued to happen time and time again, is that the NDP has voted against them every single time.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to continue my questioning regarding an issue that was raised on March 18 with the Minister of State for the Status of Women. It was regarding her ungodly behaviour at the Charlottetown airport.

At that time she threw a tantrum. There was a raucous caused by the minister who threw her boots and berated security personnel. She yelled that the province of P.E.I. was a hellhole and that she was working her stern off, as we say in the province, for those people.

The question also spoke to the matter of whether the minister had breached aviation regulations. The regulations are very clear, that if one has persistent, consistent, belligerent behaviour, one is a level 3 threat.

That was the nature of the two questions, but it speaks to a broader attitude on the part of the former leader of the opposition who is now Prime Minister, when he said that those in Atlantic Canada had a culture of defeat. He was also quoted by our premier, Premier Danny Williams, that he did not need Newfoundland and Labrador to win an election.

There is an attitude expressed by those in the Conservative Party who hold very high positions, one being the Prime Minister and one being the Minister of State for the Status of Women.

I can say as a proud Labradorian from the province of Newfoundland and Labrador and as a proud Atlantic Canadian that we take offence to those types of comments. They denigrate who we are and our contribution to not only our own communities in our own region but to the country as a whole.

I would say to the Minister of State for the Status of Women that instead of having tantrums, instead of denigrating people, provinces and regions of this country that she should focus her attention on some very important issues.

She should be focused on what is happening to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, where a shelter for women in Montreal is losing its funding, a shelter that provides fantastic services to aboriginal women, children and communities.

The minister should be focused on the issues of murdered and missing aboriginal women, and moving forward to ensure that file is addressed in a proper way through a public inquiry.

She should be concentrating on the loss of funding for native shelters for women on certain reserves. She should be focused on assistance for women in third world countries.

These are the things that the minister should be focused on, not denigrating, not calling down the people of our smallest province but certainly one of our very important provinces.

Adjournment Proceedings

•(1840)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of State responsible for the Status of Women apologized. Her apology was sincere. The members of this House must accept her apology.

[*English*]

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Speaker, is it a fact that within the Conservative Party all one has to do is make a major mistake, make an apology, and all is forgiven? If one makes a mistake, all is forgiven.

I look at the example where the government sometimes says that an organization has made mistakes in the past and it will not fund it anymore because it has made mistakes, like the First Nations University of Canada. Perhaps all the university has to say is, "We made a mistake. We're sorry and we'll get our funding back". Is that the nature of the consequences?

There are consequences when people take certain actions and certain positions. We are saying that the minister has not been fully accountable for her actions for what she said to the people of P.E.I. and how she denigrated that province.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, I do not know why the Liberal member finds it so difficult to understand "I am sorry". But then it is true that he is unable to apologize when he shouts at our members.

[*English*]

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 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:43 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Thursday, March 25, 2010

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS		
Documents regarding Afghan Detainees		
Mr. Lukiwski	909	
Plans and Priorities		
Mr. Day	909	
Interparliamentary Delegations		
Mrs. Glover	909	
Petitions		
Assisted Suicide		
Ms. Sgro	909	
Aboriginal Healing Foundation		
Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	909	
Nuclear Weapons		
Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	909	
Canada Post Corporation		
Mr. Bouchard	910	
Seeds Regulations		
Mr. Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	910	
International Aid		
Mr. McGuinty	910	
Tax Harmonization		
Mr. Julian	910	
Animal Welfare		
Mr. Miller	910	
Aboriginal Healing Foundation		
Ms. Davies (Vancouver East)	910	
Foreign Investment		
Mr. Gravelle	910	
Animal Welfare		
Mr. Rajotte	911	
Taxation		
Mr. Rajotte	911	
Housing		
Ms. Leslie	911	
Animal Welfare		
Mr. Trudeau	911	
Air Passengers' Bill of Rights		
Mr. Maloway	911	
Earthquake in Chile		
Mr. Maloway	911	
Questions on the Order Paper		
Mr. Lukiwski	911	
GOVERNMENT ORDERS		
Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act		
Bill C-2. Second reading	911	
Mr. Szabo	912	
Mr. Maloway	912	
Mr. Gravelle	912	
Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	912	
Mr. Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	913	
Ms. Ashton	915	
Mr. Laforest	915	
Mr. Julian	916	
Mr. Allen (Welland)	916	
Points of Order		
Documents Regarding Afghan Detainees		
Mr. Layton	919	
Mr. Lukiwski	919	
Mr. Bachand	920	
Mr. Goodale	921	
Mr. Harris (St. John's East)	922	
Mr. Paquette	923	
Mr. Lukiwski	923	
Mr. Mulcair	924	
The Acting Speaker (Mr. Devolin)	924	
Mr. Bagnell	924	
GOVERNMENT ORDERS		
Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act		
Bill C-2. Second reading	925	
Mr. Maloway	925	
Ms. Ashton	925	
Mr. Paquette	926	
Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	928	
Ms. Bourgeois	929	
Ms. Ashton	929	
Mr. Laforest	929	
Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	930	
Mr. Cannis	932	
Mr. Carrier	933	
Mr. Julian	933	
Mr. Brison	933	
Mr. Cardin	934	
Mr. Maloway	936	
Mr. Szabo	936	
Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	937	
Mr. Cardin	937	
Mr. Ouellet	937	
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS		
Maureen Vodrey		
Mr. Menzies	939	
Infrastructure		
Mr. Cannis	939	
United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples		
Mr. Lévesque	939	

Maternal and Child Health	
Mr. Godin	940
Canwest Canspell National Spelling Bee	
Ms. Hoepfner	940
Epilepsy	
Mr. Regan	940
Global Advocacy Days	
Mrs. Smith	940
Jean Brisson	
Mr. Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	940
The Economy	
Mr. MacKenzie	941
National Day of Reflection on the Prevention of Genocide	
Mr. Cotler	941
Project Hero	
Mr. Trost	941
Canwest Canspell National Spelling Bee	
Ms. Savoie	941
Liberal Party of Canada	
Mrs. Boucher	941
Maureen Vodrey	
Mr. Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	942
Maureen Vodrey	
Mr. Proulx	942
Liberal Party of Canada	
Mr. Armstrong	942

ORAL QUESTIONS

Afghanistan	
Mr. Ignatieff	942
Mr. Cannon	942
Mr. Ignatieff	942
Mr. Cannon	943
Mr. Ignatieff	943
Mr. Cannon	943
Mr. Dosanjh	943
Mr. Nicholson	943
Mr. Dosanjh	943
Mr. Nicholson	943
Canadian Security Intelligence Service	
Mr. Duceppe	943
Mr. Toews	943
Mr. Duceppe	943
Mr. Toews	943
Afghanistan	
Mr. Bachand	943
Mr. Cannon	944
Mr. Bachand	944
Mr. Nicholson	944

Mr. Mulcair	944
Mr. Nicholson	944
Mr. Mulcair	944
Mr. Nicholson	944
Mr. Mulcair	944
Mr. Cannon	944

Pensions

Mrs. Mendes	944
Mr. Flaherty	944
Mrs. Mendes	945
Mr. Flaherty	945

Afghanistan

Mr. Oliphant	945
Mr. MacKay	945
Mr. Oliphant	945
Mr. MacKay	945

Transportation

Mr. Laframboise	945
Mr. Baird	945
Mr. Laframboise	945
Mr. Baird	945

Maternal and Child Health

Ms. Deschamps	946
Ms. Oda	946
Ms. Deschamps	946
Ms. Oda	946

Veterans Affairs

Mr. Andrews	946
Mr. Blackburn	946
Mr. Andrews	946
Mr. Blackburn	946

The Budget

Mr. Murphy (Charlottetown)	946
Mr. Flaherty	946
Mr. Murphy (Charlottetown)	946
Mr. Lake	947

Industry

Mr. Shipley	947
Mr. Lake	947

Taxation

Ms. Charlton	947
Mr. Flaherty	947

Industry

Ms. Charlton	947
Mr. Lake	947

Securities

Mr. Paillé (Hochelega)	947
Mr. Flaherty	947
Mr. Paillé (Hochelega)	947
Mr. Flaherty	948

Political Activism

Mr. McGuinty	948
Mr. Poilievre	948

Mr. McGuinty	948
Mr. Poilievre	948
The Environment	
Mr. Donnelly	948
Mr. Prentice	948
Mr. Donnelly	948
Mr. Prentice	948
Health	
Mr. Weston (Saint John)	949
Mrs. Aglukkaq	949
Government Spending	
Ms. Ratansi	949
Mr. Paradis	949
Official Languages	
Mr. Desnoyers	949
Mr. Baird	949
Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement	
Mr. Julian	949
Mr. Van Loan	949
Economic Action Plan	
Mrs. Davidson	949
Mr. Baird	949
Agriculture	
Mr. Easter	950
Mr. Ritz	950
The Environment	
Mr. Bigras	950
Mr. Prentice	950
Mining Industry	
Mr. Gravelle	950
Mr. Lake	950
Business of the House	
Mr. Goodale	950
Mr. Hill	950
Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement Implementa- tion Act	
Bill C-2—Notice of time allocation motion	
Mr. Hill	951

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement Implementa- tion Act	
Bill C-2, Second reading	951

Mr. Julian	951
Mr. Maloway	951
Mr. Brison	952
Mr. Vincent	952
Mr. Cannis	952
Mr. Toews	955
Mr. Vincent	955
Mr. Maloway	955
Mr. Brison	956
Ms. Charlton	956
Mr. Simms	959
Mr. André	960
Mrs. Hughes	960
Mr. André	961
Mr. Simms	963
Mr. Gravelle	963
Mr. Vincent	963
Mr. Maloway	964
Mr. Dorion	966
Mr. Simms	967
Ms. Davies (Vancouver East)	967
Mr. André	967
Ms. Faille	967

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Income Tax Act	
Bill C-288, Report stage	969
Ms. Deschamps	969
Motion for concurrence	969
(Motion agreed to)	969
Ms. Deschamps	969
Bill C-288, Third reading	969
Mr. Wallace	971
Mrs. Hughes	971
Mr. Menzies	971
Mr. Pacetti	973
Ms. Ashton	974
Mr. Bouchard	976

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Industry	
Mr. Gravelle	977
Mr. Lake	977
Status of Women	
Mr. Russell	978
Mrs. Boucher	979

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