

[Translation]

Like many of his former colleagues in the other place, Senator Gauthier has been hard on the Senate at times. In fact, few are the members of Parliament who do not, at one time or another, enjoy poking fun at us, and even making derogatory remarks about us. As soon as they join us, however, even the harshest of them realize in no time that their old target is far from deserving such nonsense, and no doubt Senator Gauthier will soon join the other former members of the House of Commons who have dropped long ago the unrealistic image of the Senate they used to enjoy conveying, as opposed to the reality that now surrounds them.

[English]

Senator Bryden also brings to us vast political involvement, gained both, in theatrical parlance, "behind the scenes" and "front and centre." His commitment to his party could not be more clearly focused. It is as a committed supporter of the Liberal Party that he comes to this place.

Political parties form one of the foundations of our parliamentary system, and commitment and informed loyalty to them are essential components to their proper functioning. While the Senate, by its very nature, is a political chamber, it tries to carry out its responsibilities in as non-partisan a manner as possible, and usually succeeds. This allows even the most loyal party member to assess opposite views with a certain detachment and objectivity.

Such openness can even lead to the questioning of one's own party's position on certain issues. If Senator Bryden's support of the Liberal Party Red Book is as reflective as that of the Liberal government, I am sure we can look forward to some interesting and even surprising observations from him in due course.

This side is delighted to welcome Senators Gauthier and Bryden. We wish them well as they assume their new responsibilities.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

Hon. Finlay MacDonald: Honourable senators, I wish to extend my congratulations to my member of Parliament, now Senator Gauthier, who has served our constituency extremely well in that capacity for the last 10 years, so much so that I will be able to vote against his successor with a great deal more enthusiasm.

VISITORS IN GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of a delegation of citizens from the Czech Republic, led by Dr. Milan Uhde, Chairman of the Deputies.

SENATORS' STATEMENTS

ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

STUDY OF LOW-LEVEL MILITARY FLIGHTS OVER LABRADOR— DENIAL OF OPPORTUNITY FOR ANTHROPOLOGIST TO GIVE FULL TESTIMONY

Hon. Mira Spivak: Honourable senators, recently several of my colleagues on this side of the house have raised the issue of Canadian policy towards the abuse of human rights in foreign countries, and have done so very eloquently, I might add.

Today I should like to comment on what I believe to be a disregard of aboriginal rights, as well as human rights, closer to home. The environmental assessment review of low-level flights by military aircraft over Labrador has proceeded, despite criticism that the review is badly biased. The Leader of the Government in the Senate informed us on October 4 that the Minister of the Environment would act to replace panel members if there was one shred of evidence of bias on the part of the panel.

Let me recount what happened in the panel hearing. The panel reconvened in late October to hear testimony of technical experts, and sought to evaluate the environmental impact statement of the Department of National Defence on its proposal to increase the number of low-level flights over aboriginal lands in Labrador. Among those experts was an anthropologist from Memorial University, deemed to be qualified, unbiased and prepared to evaluate socioeconomic impacts identified in the DND report vis-à-vis guidelines established to direct the report. However, when it came time to present observations directly to the panel, the panel chairman would not allow the anthropologist to complete her statement. Furthermore, she was instructed prior to the hearings to make no reference to the major deficiencies she had detected.

The fundamental issue here is the failure of the Department of National Defence and the panel to pay adequate attention to the impact of increased military flights on aboriginal rights, human rights and the negotiation of outstanding land claims.

I wish now to place on the record the substance of what this expert witness attempted to say:

For seven years a requirement to discuss the possible effects of the project on the nature of aboriginal rights contemplated in the Constitution Act, on the negotiation and settlement of land claims in the overflight area, and on human rights defined in various bills, charters and covenants was specified in the Guidelines for the Environmental Impact Study. Furthermore, DND had a statutory obligation under the EARP Guidelines Order, to comply with the guidelines established by the first Panel in 1987.