

Human Rights

that Senators should have a 15-year tenure of office and that Senators should only sit until 70 years of age. My Party now stands for an elected Senate, but we will have to know how this will take place. If we cannot accept the Senate, let us abolish it. As long as the Senate is there, its constitutional right is to scrutinize a Bill, regardless of pressure.

We should beware at times of the massive pressure of public opinion. Some say: "You do this," and then you panic and say, "Oh, my God, there are thousands of people on the Hill, I must do this". By the time you have finished doing it, there is another group of thousands of people who say: "You should not have done that, you should have done this". That means you must be intelligent and do what you think is best.

The Senators have done their duty and I am happy that the Hon. Minister has accepted this very substantive change. The Hon. Minister is not as stubborn as his assistant who could not come to an agreement with the Senate. It was the Hon. Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark) who accepted the amendment. He knows that when Senators really get to work, they work well, but if they would have been given a little more time, they would have come out with a better Bill.

No one is attacking the integrity of the peace and security Bill. We took time, and every individual in Canada who had an interest in this matter was called in. I went to meetings day after day for 50 days. Today we have a good Bill which works very well. The same should be true of this.

I congratulate the Government for holding its nose and saying that what they say over there is not that foolish and it will accept at the last minute amendments put forward. I would like to try to make the Minister smile a little bit because I know he is extremely upset that I should speak for so long on such a very important piece of legislation.

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East): Mr. Speaker, I will not be very long. I would agree to have the Parliamentary Secretary answer some questions that I will raise. I would agree to have him answer some questions I will raise. While I was quite prepared to accept the centre as defined in the original Bill, I must say that the centre as defined by these amendments is a bit different and raises some concerns.

● (1650)

The centre we were ready to accept in the original Bill was a centre to initiate, encourage and support co-operation between Canada and other countries with respect to the strengthening of human rights. These amendments from the Senate have now introduced a new concept that the centre should not only promote human rights institutions and the development of human rights but also promote democracy. When one first looks at that we find a motherhood concept, and we are all ready to support democracy, but we also know that countries around the world define democracy in different ways.

I have a bit of concern. I would like the Parliamentary Secretary to let us know who initiated these amendments. Did they come out of a committee study in the Senate? Were they unanimously put forward in the Senate? I would like to know that because of different situations in the world. For example, the German Democratic Republic calls itself a democracy but in fact does not carry out many of the things that are set out in this amendment. It does not have the freedom of the press as we know it. It does not have pluralistic elections as we have them. On the other hand, we have the President of the United States criticizing Nicaragua and setting up an economic blockade of Nicaragua because it is not a democratic country and does not have a pluralistic democratic system. Yet there were more political Parties running in the election in Nicaragua and more Parties sitting in the Nicaragua National Assembly than there are in the American Congress.

Nicaragua might ask if they really have a democratic system in the United States. Unless one has huge sums of money, in the United States it is impossible to crack the two-party system in that country. It has a two-party system that relies on heavy financing and there is not the control of the expenditure on election campaigning as we have in Canada. One might ask if that is really democratic.

I think this amendment changes the nature of the centre to a certain extent. It was a centre in the first place that promoted and strengthened human rights institutions and dealt with the violations of human rights. By the way, human rights are more easily definable and discernible than democratic institutions. We know if someone is being tortured. We know if someone is being put in prison without trial. We know if people are being executed without trial. But when it comes to determining whether this country or that country is democratic, and what is really a proper interpretation of democracy, it becomes more difficult.

While I am willing to support this amendment because I support democracy and I support elections and the freedom of opinion and expression, I would like some assurance from the Government that we do not intend to impose our western concepts of democracy on all occasions.

It is interesting to note that if we were to apply this in a very strict manner, I think out of the approximately 150 countries in the United Nations, only 30 are democracies as we have them in the West. The great majority of the countries in the United Nations are either one-party systems, dictatorships of one kind or another or absolute monarchies, but they are not democracies as we know them. It is easy to support motherhood wording but this is motherhood wording that is open to some dangerous interpretations. I would like some assurance that we would take a small "l" liberal approach in interpreting what democracy means, what periodic elections means and what pluralistic political systems mean. All these things are mentioned in the amendment. As my hon. colleague from Saint-Denis said, to have this thrust on us at the last moment is a bit surprising.