

Human Rights

One of the serious deficiencies of this piece of legislation is its failure to deal with that. As my hon. colleague from the Liberal Party recognized, this is a significant failure which might be addressed, I suppose, by omitting, as was suggested by the report prepared by the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark) by quoting Harper and Courtney. However, it seems to me that the merit of that proposition might make it difficult to deal with that question in a productive way because I am not so sure that we want to eliminate the prospect that this centre may in fact further the development of democratic institutions. Therefore, perhaps the omission of that reference is not in order.

One of the means that have been recommended to ensure that there would be an objective consideration of that aspect of this centre's function, that is, the furthering of democratic institutions, was to ensure that there be broad representation and broad linkages drawn between the centre and those organizations and institutions which could contribute to the delineation of those values and criteria that would permit us to evaluate the extent to which progress is being made toward the development of democratic institutions.

As you will recall, *For Whose Benefit* says that this would be a free-standing body working closely with human rights groups and non-governmental organizations. The Côté-Harper report suggested that there be significant lines drawn between CIDA and the Centre for Human Rights Research and Education at the University of Ottawa. Neither of these linkages are drawn in this legislation, yet it is this kind of linkage which would permit this centre to begin to address this issue of the furthering of democratic institutions.

If we look at the structure of the board of directors we are left with another problem. If we are going to address the issue of democratic institutions there is a great danger that a too narrowly appointed board might impose an ideological set of criteria. As you know, Mr. Speaker, there are those, particularly to the south of us, who consider that the only form of democracy which has any merit is that which ensures that there will be a totally free enterprise system with no state intervention, with none of the co-operation which occurs between private industry and Government in this country.

I hesitate to say this, but there may be those who could be appointed by a Government, without consultation of the sort which is called for in these various reports, to a board of directors which, from that ideological point of view, would in fact impede the kind of democratic development that we seek to have. What we want, I think, is to be able to communicate the ideal of democratic values which are common to the Canadian people. I quite frankly confess that I think Canada must reflect internationally—not by imposing its institutions or rigid definitions on other nations—a kind of Canadian consensus of the values underlying democracy and to apply criteria developed from those values in distributing aid.

• (1220)

We are very much concerned about this issue. We are trying to find some meaningful way of addressing it which will not impede the passage of this Bill today. Therefore, we suggest we do as this House did with respect to the Centre for International Peace and Security and the board for CSIS and have the appointees appointed with consultation among all Parties in this House. This seems to me to be a very simple means of addressing a number of those concerns which I and my colleague from the Liberal Party have addressed.

What we are saying is that we consider this legislation has merit, as the centre has merit. It is an institution that all Parties agree should be established. There may be some disagreement with respect to exactly how it will proceed to do its work, but I think that can be addressed by ensuring that all Parties in the House are involved in the appointment of the board, that the board will not be established on the basis of patronage or a too narrow ideological test.

Let me indicate that the concerns we have raised are concerns expressed to us by a number of non-governmental organizations such as OXFAM, the Canadian Coalition for International Co-operation, the Parliamentary Centre for International Studies, the North-South Institute, the Canadian Network of NGOs, Amnesty International, the Task Force on Churches and Corporate Responsibility and so on. All of these organizations had concern about the inclusion of the reference to democratic development without there being in the legislation any sense of what that means, and with the failure of any kind of connection or representation upon the board of directors of this centre from CIDA or the University of Ottawa Centre. We need some means of ensuring that the centralizing tendency of the Department of External Affairs, and the prospect of potential ideological thrust being imposed upon this board, is dealt with through a simple amendment which I will propose during the consideration of Committee of the Whole.

While this Bill has a kind of centralizing tendency in the sense that all members of the board except three are appointed by the Government, we have a decentralizing counterforce to this by moving the institution to Montreal. This does not really accomplish the kind of dispersal of involvement we would prefer. We think it would be much better to consider the structure of the board as a more reasonable way in which to ensure that there is a decentralizing aspect to the character of the board and, therefore, addressing the issue of human rights and the development of democratic institutions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): There are no questions and comments. We are now entering debate under Standing Order 55(2), 20 minutes plus questions and comments.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate on Bill C-147, An Act to establish the International Centre for Human Rights and