

Government Orders

image building, for the spreading of Canadian values and interests around this globe. Hopefully through our example people around the globe will have better lifestyles.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philippe Paré (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we have before us today, in third reading, Bill C-47 to amend the Department of External Affairs Act. This is a bill of very little substance, containing almost nothing but changes in wording. It is not very innovative, and does not drastically change the way the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade operates.

All in all, this is a bill of little significance, which fits in nicely with the general level of the bills introduced by this government so far, since the opening of the session, in January 1994. Like the GATT agreements implementation bill, Bill C-47 makes cosmetic changes. It is therefore without much enthusiasm that the Bloc Québécois supports this bill which, after all, rejuvenates somewhat the old Department of External Affairs Act by giving it a more modern name.

However, the government could have taken this opportunity to make changes that could have had the merit of eliminating grey areas and clarifying certain aspects related to the purpose of Canadian foreign policy. We would have liked the new legislation to streamline the department's corporate structure by removing a few positions that have remained vacant since the Liberals came to power and which cannot be all that crucial if they have not been filled. I am referring to the positions of minister responsible for international co-operation, associate deputy minister, and co-ordinator for international economic relations.

I believe the position of Minister for International Co-operation is totally useless, since the current government does not deign to attach enough importance to international development to include in a piece of legislation the mandate and the principles governing the responsible agency. Why appoint another minister, or leave that possibility open, if that minister is going to be accountable to another department? Canadians no longer have the means to afford illusions. The government does not want to abolish positions which are deemed useless since they are currently vacant. Is its insistence that these positions remain in the act due to the fact that it wants to preserve its authority to make discretionary appointments? Do the Liberals have friends looking for jobs?

It is true that, considering the social program reform which they want to impose to Canadians, the Liberals probably do not wish to see their friends out of work. On a more serious note, I will try to show that the government missed a great opportunity to clarify its objectives in the context of official development assistance.

The day after the government tabled its foreign policy statement, it is appropriate to remember that there are three key objectives that will guide the government's activities on the international scene: the promotion of jobs and prosperity; the protection of our security in a stable international framework; and the sharing of our values and our culture.

Among the values that the government wants to promote, the Minister of Foreign Affairs referred, in his speech here yesterday, to generosity, compassion and co-operation. As well, the majority report of the joint committee reviewing Canadian foreign policy proposes that the government set the reduction of poverty in the world as the first objective for official development assistance.

That being said, how are we to interpret clause 7 in Bill C-47, and I quote:

The minister may develop and carry out programs related to his powers, duties and functions for the promotion of Canada's interest abroad, including the fostering of the expansion of Canada's international trade and commerce and the provision of assistance for developing countries.

In committee, the clause was split in two: A and B.

• (1545)

How can a foreign policy focus on promoting Canada's interests and at the same time claim that eliminating poverty is to be the goal of its official development assistance?

During the foreign policy review, many witnesses and experts stressed the need to clarify the objectives of official development assistance. The joint committee also reminded the government that it was not CIDA's role to promote trade. Unfortunately, clause 7 appears to maintain these inconsistencies. We would have liked to see another amendment to the existing legislation, specifically on international development. The official opposition in this House has already suggested that a specific legislative framework was needed for the Canadian International Development Agency. We believe that Bill C-47 could have provided for these changes. In fact, in our dissenting report on Canada's foreign policy review tabled last fall, we recommended such changes.

There would have been a number of advantages to adopting enabling legislation for CIDA. Separating Canadian official development assistance, once and for all, from any involvement in international trade is a prime example. In fact, the confusion today within the Department of Foreign Affairs about interests and objectives as they affect international development exists because there is no separation between trade and aid. The Auditor General made that clear in his latest report.

We certainly do not want to give the impression that it is wrong to promote Canada's trade relations. On the contrary. We too are aware of the fact that over 20 per cent of jobs in Canada are tied to our exports of goods and services. What we do not