

Human Rights

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, I am aware of a number of changes the Senate has proposed to amend Bill C-147.

I wonder whether the Government could explain to the House the scope of these amendments and perhaps give us an opportunity to consider and discuss this important issue here in the House. Bill C-147, as you know, is a proposal we support and that, we believe, represents a reasonable position, but we would like some details on the process and perhaps a little more information on the amendment proposed by the Senate.

[English]

Mr. Jim Hawkes (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, as Members will know, the Bill in the form originally passed by the House referred in Clause 4 to the International Bill of Human Rights and certain things flowed from that. The amendments to Clause 4 make it more clear so that the average Canadian could look at the Bill and understand what it is intended to do. It is really the addition of some words such as "democratic human rights" in that clause which make it more clear. They were already in the Bill passed by the House in statutory form but in reference to the human rights Bill. Now they are in the clause itself for ease of reading and understanding.

The amendment to Clause 28 is designed to make sure that Parliament has the legal authority in the future to vote funds for the purposes specified in Clause 4. In particular, if Members look at Clause 4(b) where it says "support programs and activities for the benefit of countries other than developing countries", there was a sense in the Senate that the statutory authority to vote the funds existed only for developing countries. The insertion of that clause is to make sure that we are able to vote funds not only for developing countries but for non-developing countries.

In effect, the amendments are there for clarity as well as making sure we have the legal authority to vote funds in future to make sure the endeavour is a success. The Government is very pleased to be able to support these amendments and if Members have other questions, I am sure the House would give unanimous consent for me to rise again and give the answers if I can.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Prud'homme (Saint-Denis): Mr. Speaker, I studied the Bill very carefully. I am sorry to say that we passed such an important Bill with incredible haste. I know that my colleague from Notre-Dame-de-Grâces—Lachine East (Mr. Allmand) intended to take part in the consideration of this Bill, just as I did. We were both coming from Montreal to the House and unanimous consent had quickly been given when we arrived. The Bill had even passed third reading when we were to speak in the afternoon and the Bill was adopted.

I am sorry to get on the nerves of the majority by talking this afternoon. I have no intention to filibuster, but this Bill is very important to me.

I took part with the Right Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau in setting up the Institute for Peace and Security in 1984. That Bill was like this one. But I must tell the Speaker of the House that when we studied that Bill in 1984, we went through all the stages in the House. We sent the Bill to a Parliamentary Committee which I had the honour to chair for months. We studied that Bill and heard 52 witnesses. I know that the Minister is very annoyed, but what I do not understand is why always . . . As a Member of Parliament, I hope that in the future, if I have the honour to be re-elected, we will learn that very important bills should be presented in good time so that we Members can not only really discuss them but also call the people from across Canada who have a tremendous interest in that legislation. This is not just any Bill. It is a Bill to create an international centre for human rights and democratic development.

We passed it with incredible haste and today, people say to me, "I would have liked to testify. I had concrete suggestions to make. How come you did not proceed as you did with the Bill to create the Institute for Peace and Security?"

This Bill was voted on in such haste, so quickly that even today, the Government in the last minute is accepting an amendment made by the Senate. I do not intend to defend the Senate, but once again, it may do some good for the Senate to know that a Member of the Lower House can talk eloquently, I hope, about it. But the Senate, after looking at the Bill and scrutinizing it, came to the conclusion that it was quite unacceptable. If you want a good Bill, amendments will have to be made.

Today we are given a quick explanation of the amendments that were just accepted by the Senate. They relate to the purpose of the Bill, Mr. Speaker. We know very well that the purpose of a Bill almost always has legal effect and the whole purpose of this Bill was changed.

The Hon. Parliamentary Secretary gave us explanations. I would not want to make myself too unpopular this afternoon by questioning every line of that Senate amendment, but what the Senate has just proposed to us is much more than that and the Government has accepted it, because it wants to have this Bill. They blindly accepted what the majority in the Senate wanted. They accepted it. That proves that the Senate, which has a constitutional duty . . . I am not defending the Senate, but I do defend its constitutional right to go through bills, which we often pass with incredible speed here, with a fine-toothed comb. And the Senate, after giving it careful consideration, decided to change the purpose of the Bill completely. And despite what we were just told, clause 28 that was just amended is not meant to allow the Government to vote additional money for countries which are not less developed.