

Bibles

rights and humanitarian issues will continue to feature prominently in East-West relations and will be the means by which the vast majority of the public will gauge the sincerity of undertakings within the CSCE context. This makes it all the more important for governments to move in the direction of better respect for human rights and humanitarian co-operation and to be seen to be doing so. This is most important, in my opinion. It is not just a case of being seen to be doing so, because as was once said you can con the people some of the time but not all the time, and the rest of the world is watching.

Unfortunately, there is a tendency on the part of some governments of Eastern Europe to dismiss the importance of what the public in the west thinks. That is a serious mistake on their part and we have to find ways of impressing that point on them. Those members of the House who were able to participate in the Belgrade meeting of the CSCE had perhaps one of the best opportunities of doing so. Certainly the Canadian delegation made the point repeatedly about the importance of living up to the undertakings in the Final Act: otherwise, there was a real danger of public skepticism about the value of the CSCE process and even about détente itself.

We did not get agreement on the various human rights and humanitarian proposals Canada and other western countries put forward at Belgrade and the concluding document that emerged fell far short of what we hoped at the beginning it might be possible to achieve. In fact, the document was no more than it was primarily because the reality of the situation at Belgrade was that the Soviet Union and its friends were not ready to see any forward movement on the vital questions of human rights and humanitarian co-operation and the western delegations refused to agree to an unbalanced document that did not take into account their concerns on these issues.

As the Belgrade meeting is over, the question we have to address ourselves to is what we can do to encourage the kind of progress sought in the motion before us between now and Madrid when the 35 CSCE participants will meet again.

Mr. Paproski: Let the motion pass.

Mr. Condon: We cannot simply carry on as though all our problems were resolved at Belgrade and the slate had been wiped clean. The Eastern European governments have to understand that the questions we regard as urgent have to be taken seriously and that their unwillingness to do so cannot fail to have an effect on our dealings with them. We as members of parliament have just as much a role to play in bringing about an understanding of this point during our encounters with Eastern European officials and parliamentarians at international meetings and during visits.

This is an issue about which all of us are most concerned. Again I congratulate the hon. member for Fraser Valley West whose comments I appreciate.

Mr. Mark MacGuigan (Windsor-Walkerville): Mr. Speaker, I rise to contribute to this debate because I believe firmly in the thrust of the position advocated by the hon. member for Fraser Valley West (Mr. Wenman). However, I am bound to

[Mr. Condon.]

take exception to one aspect of the presentation of the hon. member for Surrey-White Rock (Mr. Friesen). It is important that we use terms accurately in this debate. He used the word "Russia" throughout and I think it is very important that we should understand that this is not a problem with Russia as such but with the Soviet Union.

Mr. Friesen: I used that expression, true.

Mr. MacGuigan: I have no doubt. But this is a point well worth making. There are many important nations within the Soviet Union from the point of view of national origin. Our issue is not with those nations but with the Soviet Union and its policy position.

The question of the importation of bibles and other religious materials into the Soviet Union is directly linked to that of religious freedom. As such, it falls squarely into the Agreement on Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Helsinki accord, as it is called. Basket one contains provision for this very type of thing. In accordance with the seventh principle, the participating states undertake to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief. It may also be said to fall into basket three, which pertains more directly to human rights and relates to such things as humanitarian principles involving the free movement of people, ideas and information.

● (1752)

However, even beyond that, the Soviet Union's own constitution guarantees for its citizens the right to observe any religion they choose. The problem is that the actual practice of religion in the Soviet Union is much more difficult. Opposed to the theoretical freedom of religion are the practices and ideals of communism. The Soviet Union officially espouses atheism and, as a result, ensures that atheism is taught to all children in the Soviet Union.

To counter the effect of religion, obstacles are placed in the way of its practice. The most important are the banning of public proselytizing and strict limitations on the teaching of religion to children under the age of 18. Religion is also interfered with by the strict controls that are kept on the churches and their priests and by the limitations which are placed on the availability of religious materials.

While bibles are printed in the Soviet Union, they are printed in numbers that are woefully inadequate for the need. In order to prevent proliferation of such material from other sources, a ban is placed on the importation of such materials as well. This ban takes the form of customs regulations. Tourists and visitors to the Soviet Union are allowed to bring with them religious material for their personal use only.

Freedom of religion is one of the issues which clearly separates east and west. Canada, as part of its contribution to the east-west dialogue, has always insisted that basic freedoms such as that of religion must be fully respected if relations not only between Canada and the U.S.S.R. but also between east and west generally are to progress. Canada has pointed out that people here care about issues such as this. They care that