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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, February 16, 2016

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, February 16, 2016

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*English*]

FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION ACT

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): moved for leave to introduce Bill C-220, an act to amend the Financial Administration Act (balanced representation).

She said: Mr. Speaker, today, New Democrats again propose legislation to require that the Government of Canada have balanced appointments, men and women, on federal crown corporation boards.

Last week, I met with the Nanaimo Port Authority, a fantastic, dynamic, professional board, with more women than men. Sadly, this is the exception in Canada. Women make up only 27% of federal appointments to crown corporation boards in this country. That is not acceptable. These agencies are missing out on the professionalism, the advice, and the wisdom of Canadian women.

Therefore, we are proposing concrete action to ensure the equality of men and women on crown corporation boards.

The bill carries forward the work of former MP Anne-Marie Day and the member for London—Fanshawe, who proposed this legislation in the previous session. It was voted down by the Conservatives two years ago.

Canada's government should use the power that it has to recognize women's contributions to the economy. Crown corporation boards should be gender balanced.

Actions speak louder than words.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, today I am honoured to present two petitions.

The first concerns genetically modified organisms.

[*English*]

The petitioners are primarily from Saskatoon. They call upon this House and government to label genetically modified products and those products that contain genetically modified ingredients.

SHARK FINNING

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition comes primarily from petitioners in my own riding of Saanich—Gulf Islands.

The petitioners call upon this House to take action to ban the possession, trade, and sale in shark fins. As members of this House will know, the trade in shark fins poses a monstrous threat to the survival of many shark species in our oceans.

WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the great pleasure of presenting a petition duly signed by Canadian citizens drawing the attention of the House to the following matters:

The petitioners request that Parliament formally endorse and adopt United Nations Resolution A/RES/65/5, as unanimously declared by the United Nations General Assembly on October 20, 2010, and, by means of its powers vested in our Canadian House of Commons, officially declare the first week of every future February as World Interfaith Harmony Week of Canada.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand at this time.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

S. O. 52

●(1010)

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

ZIKA VIRUS OUTBREAK

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a request for an emergency debate from the member for Vancouver Kingsway.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise pursuant to Standing Order 52(2) to seek leave to propose an emergency debate on Canada's response to the Zika virus in the western hemisphere.

An emergency debate is required in order to allow parliamentarians to address national and international implications of the outbreak of the mosquito-borne Zika virus; its potential linkage to the birth defect known as “microcephaly”; and the implications for the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Department of Global Affairs, and Canadian Blood Services. Canadian travellers are at risk of contracting the virus while travelling in Zika-endemic regions. In fact, several cases of Zika infection have already been confirmed in Canada. According to the World Health Organization, the Zika virus has spread explosively through the Americas, affecting over 23 countries so far. The WHO estimates that some four million cases of Zika infection are expected to occur and have labelled this outbreak a “public health emergency of global concern”.

Recent reports have emerged of the possibility of sexual transmission of the virus in the United States. Out of concern for blood safety, blood supply authorities in the U.S. and Canada have now stopped accepting blood donations from travellers returning from Zika-endemic regions. Yesterday, Hawaii declared a public state of emergency over the outbreak of dengue fever, which is carried by the same mosquito as carries the Zika virus. With the 2016 Olympics scheduled for this summer in Brazil, which will attract many athletes and travellers including a large contingent from Canada, the health implications for Canadians are real and urgent.

Canadians still lack information about the nature of the risks posed by the Zika virus and the availability of health services, particularly for pregnant women and women considering pregnancy. In early February, a pregnant Canadian woman was denied a Zika test in Ontario following her return from Brazil. She was forced to go public with her case in order to receive the testing she required. This case underscores the need for the Canadian health care system to respond more effectively to the Zika outbreak. With millions of cases expected in the Americas over the next year, the Canadian government must be prepared to respond effectively to keep Canadians safe.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I call your attention to the emergency debate requested in September 2014 on the Ebola outbreak, which was granted by the former Speaker of the House of Commons, the hon. Andrew Scheer. Similar to Ebola, the Zika outbreak requires parliamentarians to respond through a timely and constructive debate to determine the best way forward to keep Canadians safe.

As always, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your careful consideration of this application, and I apologize for mentioning the name of the previous Speaker.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I thank the member, both for the request and for the apology for mentioning the name of the previous Speaker. I did not notice at the time, so I am glad he raised that.

I appreciate the member raising this question. However, I do not find that it meets the exigencies of the standing order at this time.

[Translation]

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 52, I am requesting an emergency debate on the possible loss of two of the leading lights of Quebec's economy, Rona and Bombardier, and on the urgent measures that must be taken to avoid potential negative impacts on Quebec's economy and jobs.

We know what a big player Rona is with its many stores, not to mention its supply chain. Half of the company's expenses are in Quebec, and 84% are within Canada. All that will be in jeopardy if Rona is sold to Lowe's, an American company.

Parliament can get involved under the Investment Canada Act, which empowers the minister to authorize or prohibit the sale, or to attach conditions to it, but because of international agreements, the Government of Quebec cannot interfere.

Also top of mind is Bombardier, which will be in trouble if the federal government does not help out and if the family that is the majority shareholder is forced to sell its shares, thereby losing voting control. With the low Canadian dollar, the company could fall into foreign hands.

I would remind the House that Bombardier is the largest employer in Quebec's manufacturing sector. Many subcontractors depend on it, and a number of businesses in the aeronautics sector are already struggling. Look at the recent layoffs at Bell Helicopter. The minister needs to make some decisions on this issue. He needs to examine the situation and tell us what he plans to do about it. If he has not yet made up his mind, we have some suggestions for him.

Requests for emergency debate ought to relate to urgent, extraordinary issues. Obviously, from my perspective, this matter is urgent. Unfortunately, Bloc Québécois and Green Party members cannot avail themselves of an opposition day or routine motion to discuss such matters, because not all members enjoy the same rights and recognition in this place.

That is why I am requesting that we rely on an extraordinary motion, considering the urgency of the situation.

●(1015)

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I want to thank the hon. member for his request, but I do not believe that it meets the exigencies of the standing order.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House resumed from February 5 consideration of the motion that Bill C-4, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Foothills has nine minutes remaining in questions and comments.

The hon. member for Chilliwack—Hope.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over a week ago, I listened very intently to the member's speech and I have been waiting over the constituency week to ask him a question. I know he had a good week, like I did.

I want to get his comments on the fact that when the Conservative government first came into office in 2006, its first bill was the Federal Accountability Act, to change the way that Ottawa worked, to reduce the influence of lobbyists, and to bring accountability to Canadians. Yet, the Liberal government's first bill is to reduce accountability, roll back accountability for unions, and take away secret ballots for union members. Over 80% of union members supported the provisions that were brought in under the Conservative government, such as supporting secret ballots for certification and decertification and more transparency for the finances of unions.

Perhaps he could talk about the differences in philosophy between the Conservative Party, which is on the side of the worker, and his party, which is on the side of the big union bosses.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, that is exactly right. I spoke about that in my speech. This is not just with this bill but a trend that we are seeing with the new Liberal government.

The first act of business for the new Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs is to ignore the First Nations Financial Transparency Act. The second one for the new Minister of Democratic Institutions is to tell Canadians that it is not right to have a referendum when changing such an important part of our democratic foundation. Now the first order of business for the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour is to gut legislation that brings accountability and transparency to unions.

It seems like, piece by piece, the new government's mandate is to dismantle our democracy, including the opportunity for union members. As my colleague said, the vast majority of them support accountability and transparency and want secret ballots. They want to make sure they can vote with their consciences when they are certifying and decertifying as a union. The new government's plan, which we are seeing in almost every ministry along the line, is to reduce accountability and transparency. I find that very disconcerting.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, for the members who have just arrived in the House of Commons, it is fascinating to hear the revisionist history from the Conservatives, that they are on the side of the working people and

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transparency. I could not think of anything more bizarre. I would actually think they were kidding us, but it is this kind of undermining of public confidence that the Conservative Party has specialized in.

The Conservatives' idea of privacy is maximum privacy for their friends and maximum accountability for the public, whereas it really should be maximum accountability for politicians and privacy for individuals. I mention that because there was the Brent Rathgeber bill last session, a Conservative bill, which was a very good bill about bringing accountability to Ottawa. The Conservatives gutted that bill. They gutted a bill that would have disclosed the salaries of the people who worked for the party. They gutted a bill that would have disclosed the kind of money that was being paid out. Brent thought that a \$188,000 threshold should be made public. They cut it so that only people making over \$444,000 a year had to disclose that.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague this. The Conservatives beat up on the unions, they beat up on first nations leadership, but they protected their friends for the last eight years. Why the hypocrisy?

• (1020)

Mr. John Barlow: Madam Speaker, it is interesting that my colleague talks about the public trust and yet, when it comes time to vote for Bill C-4, I am sure he is going to vote for it and he will be voting against secret ballots for unions. How does he not see that is not in the public trust? He is saying that union members should not have the ability to have a secret ballot, and I just cannot believe that. We heard that a lot in the NDP and Liberal speeches, that somehow a secret ballot is undemocratic and adds additional bureaucracy and red tape to this process.

I would like to ask the member in what field he feels a secret ballot is undemocratic. That is really disconcerting. This seems to be the path that the other parties in the House seem to want to go down.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the first questioner and the person providing the answer were wrong when they made the statement that the first order of business was Bill C-4.

Let us be very clear. The Government of Canada and the Prime Minister's first order of business in this House was to give tax breaks to Canadians. That was the first order of business.

This bill that we are talking about today is rectifying a wrong. The government, through the back door of private members' legislation, passed two labour bills which offended not only the labour movement but also many businesses throughout the country, from coast to coast to coast.

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Focusing strictly on the legislation, would the member not agree that the previous Conservative government was wrong in using the back door of private members' hour instead of trying to build a consensus between labour and the different stakeholders in changing legislation? It intentionally used the back door of private members' hour to have confrontation in an area where there should be more harmony. That was the former government's record.

Mr. John Barlow: Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's question.

First, if he had actually listened to anything that was going on today, or maybe last Friday, my comments were that the first piece of legislation brought forward by the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour was this bill, which guts accountability and transparency of unions.

I did not say anything about the government. We can get into a discussion about how great it has been in that first 100 days, but we would be here for a long time.

Let us talk about the back door. Is it deplorable to ensure that the members of Parliament have an opportunity to speak their mind, to speak to the issues of their constituents? It was very clear how the party across the aisle felt about that when we brought forward a motion to support energy east: all four of the Liberal Alberta MPs voted against that. That shows on this side of the House that we empower our MPs to speak their minds, but on that side, not so much.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise on the hypocrisy of the Conservatives with regard to secret ballots.

I do not know if he voted that day, but I will remind the member that the rest of his members, or at least many of them, did vote on a secret ballot to elect the Speaker. I find the hypocrisy of secret balloting that he is noting rather interesting when he was either a participant in it or his colleagues were.

I would like to have a yes or no answer. Did the member participate in a secret ballot? What does he think about his colleagues participating in a secret ballot?

Mr. John Barlow: Madam Speaker, I do not know if he is saying that a secret ballot is bad. A secret ballot is a cornerstone of our democracy, a hallmark. If we look at any level of government, municipal, provincial, or federal, they are elected by secret ballot.

Why would this be the one time that we say it is good for everything else in the Canadian political landscape except for unions, that that is the one spot where we should not allow them to have a secret ballot because for some reason that is undemocratic?

I would like that member to explain to me how he finds secret ballots for unions to be undemocratic.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, my question is very simple. The bills that were introduced under the Conservative government were introduced by members who were not ministers.

Would the member approve of allowing other members who are not ministers, or about 150 people in the Liberal Party right now, to

introduce bills, or should they all be regarded as bills brought in through the back door?

• (1025)

[*English*]

Mr. John Barlow: Madam Speaker, exactly. This is an opportunity for members of Parliament, no matter where they sit in this House, to speak.

I do not think it should just be ministers who should have an opportunity to bring forward bills. The whole idea is that we are speaking for our residents, our constituents. We have that voice, and we should be able to exercise it.

Hon. Judy Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased on this snowy Tuesday morning to have an opportunity to voice my concerns about some of the legislation passed by the previous government. It is a part of the things that we are going to have to fix.

Bill C-4 is sound legislation that has been written in collaboration. I emphasize that word because it is important when we are producing legislation that it be done in collaboration with the people who are going to be affected. That was not done in the previous government. It was done through a private member's bill, not through the government introducing a piece of legislation the proper way. It was done through the back door, and I am sure we will see that attempted again. However, this time the Conservatives are on that side and we are the government.

Labour stakeholders are important people for us to be talking to when we are putting legislation together, and we have the intention of reversing several destructive policies from the previous Conservative regime. Specifically, Bill C-4 will repeal Bill C-377, Conservative legislation that promised to upset existing labour relations and did just that. It ignored the fact that union financial disclosure, which they continually talk about, is already addressed in the Canada Labour Code and many provincial labour statutes. It failed to recognize that Bill C-377 is discriminatory against unions and ignores other types of organizations. It is one of those pick and choose options, which was very typical of the previous government. Why were professional associations not part of that? They also received favourable treatment under taxation law, but no one said anything about the professional associations and promised to invade the privacy of labour organizations and their members.

Obviously, the underlying intention of Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, the other legislation being repealed by Bill C-4, was to attack organized labour. I am pleased to say, thank goodness that assault is over, which brings me to the second point.

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Bill C-4 marks the end of the federal government's intentional confrontation with labour. Most who follow these matters will readily admit that Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, both brought in by the previous Conservative government, were part of a hostile attitude toward labour and labour supporters. Bill C-4 will help to set that relationship back on a positive path, something that would improve working conditions, advance productivity, help create jobs, and continue to build this great country of ours.

Of course, creating jobs, promoting innovation, and improving productivity were key planks in our Liberal platform. Moreover, our government recognizes the important role that unions play in protecting the rights of Canadian workers and in helping the middle class grow and prosper. I am pleased to add my support to this approach.

We on this side of the House are committed to fair and balanced federal labour policy, and one of those steps is what we are doing today by repealing Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. Bill C-377 had nothing to do with efficiency. There was a lot of talk about that, but it had nothing to do with efficiency. It actually created new and unnecessary red tape for unions. This happened because the government imposed new demands on workers, even though the Canada Labour Code and many provincial labour statutes already ensure financial accountability from unions. This costly by-product of a vindictive and anti-labour government put unions at a disadvantage during collective bargaining, hindering productivity at the front end of the process.

Then, just to make things worse, Bill C-525 made it more difficult for employees to unionize and easier for a bargaining agent to be decertified. This negativity, which is a continued rant on unions, took a toll on labour and the environment in which they have to function. Bill C-4 is part of our government's plan to ensure that Canada's labour laws best serve employees, and, very importantly, employers, which by extension also serves Canadians. Put another way, when labour is successful, our economy can prosper in ways that ensure prosperity is felt by each and every Canadian, not just a select few at the top of the corporate ladder.

● (1030)

It is also worth noting that Bill C-4 does more than stop the federal government's attack on labour; it also responds to very serious concerns expressed by experts all across Canada. For example, the Alberta union of public employees launched a constitutional challenge against Bill C-377. While the court proceedings have been temporarily suspended, given this government's stated intervention to repeal the bill, the underlying concerns remain valid. Privacy concerns were also raised by the Canadian Bar Association and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada. The CBA suggested that the bill may be subject to legal challenges on those very grounds.

Despite all of this, the previous government plunged forward with its ideologically driven legislative agenda, which showed indifference to the Canadians who were suffering and the difficulties it was creating in our economy and our country. This is just a small snapshot of the trouble prompted by the passage of Bill C-377.

Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island are all on the record as opposing

Bill C-377. Those seven provinces, bastions of manufacturing, resource extraction, hospitality and tourism, and countless other sectors that are vital to GDP maintenance and growth, all called on the previous federal government to stop the assault against labour.

Let us stop to think about the fact that seven of our ten provinces were actively opposing this and the Conservative government did not care. It did not matter to the Conservatives. They had their own ideology, and that is what they were working with. These seven premiers specifically raised concerns that Bill C-377 encroached upon their jurisdiction over labour issues. They also criticized the bill for potentially destabilizing their labour relations environment, particularly with respect to collective bargaining processes. These premiers know that kicking labour does nothing to advance job creation or industrial growth or relationships.

Three of the provinces, Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, also criticized Bill C-377 for eroding the privacy rights of union members and expressed concerns that it would create an unnecessary burden on labour organizations. These premiers understand the added dangers of more red tape.

However, Bill C-377 was not the only problem with the labour agenda of the Conservatives. Sadly, for a government that pretended to have a strong fiscal management style, much was lacking in its approach. It could be argued that multiple recessions, waning consumer confidence, and shaky job numbers all bore witness to clear Conservative fiscal failures.

Bill C-525 was equally problematic for many stakeholders. A number of labour organizations, such as the CLC, Unifor, the Air Line Pilots Association, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, and the Public Service Alliance of Canada, all expressed opposition to Bill C-525, arguing that the card check certification model is quicker, more efficient, and more likely to be free of employer interference.

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However, good governance was not the goal of Bill C-377 or Bill C-525, which is why Liberals in the Senate and the House opposed the legislation. Of course, debate is healthy and something we want to see happen, especially when it comes to any measure that impacts such a large section of society. Unfortunately, the process used to pass Bill C-525 did not allow debate to surface. That is because the previous Conservative government introduced their agenda in Bill C-525 via a private member's bill rather than government legislation. If the government is serious about doing something, it introduces its own legislation; it does not do it through a back door via a private member's bill. This may seem like a nuance, but the tactic is not without compromise and consequences. Government legislation is introduced after public consultation and outreach. A private member's bill comes with no such effort, and it shows in the diminished quality of the statute.

• (1035)

Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 are faulty and they are hurting the economy. Bill C-4 would repeal them, because we need to make sure that labour has the tools it needs as well for success.

All labour organizations in Canada, including even the smallest locals and national unions, labour councils, federations of labour and other umbrella organizations, as well as intermediate organizations, were left out of the process by the previous government. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has said that more than 18,000 labour entities would be affected by the implementation of Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, yet the government of the day locked them all out of the process. That is wrong. Bill C-4 would make things right again.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's comments. Her comments that struck me the most strange were her repeated references to the back door, referring to members of Parliament using private members' legislation to advance a cause that is important.

I have had the privilege and honour of having two pieces of private members' legislation passed in the House in the last 10 years, and at no time did I or any of the people supporting my initiatives consider the method I used as back door. It is demeaning to every member in the House to consider private members' legislation a back door. This is the basis of our democracy in Canada, and it is a real disservice to have repeated references to this as a back door by the member and the previous member.

Let me get more to the point of Bill C-4 and what it would do in terms of repealing some of the initiatives that our government undertook. In terms of accountability, we know, just recently during the election, that there were a number of times when the Liberal government actually had unions pay their members to come to announcements. I do not believe that most of the union members were aware of that. The bills we put forward to enact more transparency would have addressed that.

Why does the member think it is not important for union members to know how their dollars are being spent?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Madam Speaker, let me begin by recognizing the great work that my colleague on the other side of the House did with those particular bills to which he referred. Those bills were supported by almost everybody in the House.

However, there is a big difference between introducing the kinds of private members' bills that he did versus something that would affect labour movement throughout our country. Private members' bills, for those who are new here, are wonderful tools members' can use to advance issues they care about. However, changing the rules of labour legislation across the country is not the kind of thing that would get done through private members' bills.

I happen to have Local 183 in my riding, a major labour union. I talk to many of the rank and file folks about these issues, not just the leadership at the top. They understand what Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 do, and they are totally opposed to them. They want to make sure that they have the right and opportunity to continue to enjoy pensions, the great health care benefits they have, and the wonderful things that their families get to enjoy as a result of their participation in an active, strong union.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Madam Speaker, the hon. member for Humber River—Black Creek made an excellent point when she said that some of the anti-worker legislation passed by the former Conservative government interfered with provincial jurisdiction over labour relations.

I wonder, though, whether the member could explain if the Liberal Party's new-found respect for the provinces and for working people extends to the field of pensions. During the election campaign, the Liberal Party talked about improving the Canada pension plan. When the Minister of Finance met with the provinces, he found that almost all of them were in favour of doing so. Only the right-wing governments of Brad Wall and Christy Clark objected, and yet the hon. finance minister seems to have let the Canada pension plan fall by the wayside.

I wonder if the member for Humber River—Black Creek could recommit to improving Canada pension plan benefits for working people in our great country.

• (1040)

Hon. Judy Sgro: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his interest in the issue of pensions.

I was the critic at one point on the issue of pensions when I was on the other side of the House, and I did a lot of work on the issue. It is an important issue for Canadians. We want to make sure they have pensions. At that time there were concerns over bankruptcy and insolvency and what would happen to companies with unfunded liabilities. There are a lot of complexities in the pension file, but it is extremely important that we take action.

We have been in government for just over 100 days and we have already done an amazing number of things through the leadership of our Prime Minister. My colleague should be patient. Changes to the Canada pension plan need to happen, and I do hope they happen. I am quite confident that in the future the member will see a variety of changes to our pension plan that will make it better for all Canadians.

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Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Madam Speaker, one of the questions and comments that we continually hear from the official opposition across the aisle is that there is no broad support by the membership for unions. I can assure the House that I have not received one phone call, one email, or any correspondence against Bill C-4.

I would like to ask if my hon. colleague could comment on that. Has she received any correspondence from her constituents against Bill C-4?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Madam Speaker, no I have not. What I did receive from another major carpenters' union, Local 27 in Toronto, was its concern about what this would do to the membership, the undermining of unions.

If we look at all of that and tie it back into the previous question on the provinces, we see that building and advancing a country is about working together. That means we have to work together with our provinces. Whether we are talking about labour issues or pension issues, our new government's relationship with our provinces now is on a very positive upswing, versus the previous government that rarely met with any of the provincial leaders. Certainly the prime minister did not have ministers meetings. Those are really important opportunities for us to share knowledge and information with each other, but to be able to advance Canada's agenda we need to have the provinces on side. They were not on side with Bill C-377.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, my riding of Sarnia—Lambton has a very large construction union workforce. It is one of the best in North America, certainly top notch in safety, quality, and productivity. During the campaign, I spoke to many of the members, the union workers as well as the leadership, and I did not have the same experience as the member across the aisle. They understood the importance of the transparency and accountability that were coming from Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. Their concerns were more about minor modifications that they wanted to see in terms of the onerous paperwork they were complaining about for items over \$5,000 and also the political participation documentation. On Bill C-525, their only objection was that they wanted to make sure that, when people showed up to vote, only the people who showed up to vote had their votes counted as a percentage.

Therefore, in terms of the worker support, they understood that there was something good in these bills to protect their rights in transparency and accountability. The government is eliminating it without providing any other mechanism to address those concerns. My question for the member is this. What mechanisms is she going to put in place to ensure transparency and accountability?

• (1045)

Hon. Judy Sgro: Madam Speaker, Bill C-4 would repeal Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. It would turn around and ultimately strengthen the relationship with our labour unions across our great country.

As for the words “transparency and accountability”, we have heard for 10 or 12 years all about transparency and accountability and how the government was going to be so transparent and accountable. At the end of the day, it was a major disappointment because the government of the day, the Conservative government,

was the complete opposite of transparent and accountable. As a Canadian, I found it a huge disappointment. There was a lot of talk, but what did it deliver? It was the exact opposite.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is fascinating to hear the Conservatives tell us that they are friends of the workers. It is sort of like the crocodile inviting us down to the riverbank to have a luncheon with him.

We saw the attack on labour. We saw the attack on environmental groups. We saw the attack on any organization that was seen as even a potential threat to the ideology of the Conservative government. The attacks it launched against charities, from OXFAM to PEN to birdwatchers, which were absolutely unconscionable, were allowed to happen in the country. I would like to ask my hon. colleague's thoughts on the matter.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Madam Speaker, it is always amazing, because sometimes we forget just how much damage was being done by the previous government. Our charities are out there actively trying to raise money for a variety of causes and to make a difference in our country, then being attacked, investigated, and fearing for their lives if they ever criticized the government. I cannot tell you how many groups came to see me. They were so afraid of saying anything in case the Conservative government would come after them, whether through CRA or other cases.

That is not the Canada we want, and I am really glad that we have moved on to a new Canada with our new Prime Minister.

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Liberal government. Since it was elected in October last year, the new Prime Minister has promised more accountability, more transparency, and more openness, yet even though he put this in the mandate letters for his ministers and in fact he said, “We have also committed to set a higher bar for openness and transparency in government”, why is it that this, one of the Liberals' first pieces of legislation, in fact, would gut transparency and accountability that was created by legislation that we, as the Conservative government, brought in?

Repealing Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 sends a very clear message: The Liberals care more about thanking union bosses who helped them get elected than they care about the hard-working union members. These union members are the ones whose dues were spent without consultation. Union leaders need to be held accountable, and they need to tell their members and the public how their tax-advantaged income is spent.

Our Conservative government was a strong supporter of accountability. Our Conservative government introduced the Federal Accountability Act and other legislation designed to increase transparency in government agencies and crown corporations. Bill C-377 was simply about transparency requirements that fall upon entities that enjoy public trust and will allow Canada to catch up with other advanced economies when it comes to financial disclosure.

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It is important to note that the union funding model itself delivers over \$4.5 billion annually to labour organizations in Canada. If individuals work in a unionized workplace, they are required by law to pay dues. If they refuse, they are fired. This financial power alone should be reason enough to require enhanced transparency, and I will say a little more about that shortly.

The workers are forced to make these contributions, including those in my riding of Haldimand—Norfolk. They deserve to know how their money is being spent, as do members of the general public who subsidize this revenue through the tax system.

It should come as no surprise that a Nanos poll found that 86% of unionized Canadians support greater transparency for labour organizations, and a 2013 Leger survey said that 83% of all working Canadians want our union leaders to follow the example set by other nations' union leaders who joined with government to achieve public disclosure. Many of Canada's labour unions publicly supported Bill C-377. This is what Marc Roumy, a member of the Canadian Union of Public Employees had to say:

...many of my colleagues and [I] believe our union would be stronger if we had a truly open and easy access to our union's financial statements. If we have nothing to hide...

—then they should be able to get detailed financial statements, which they have fought for, for years.

If we are looking for support for these measures, look no further than the former head of the AFL-CIO, which is the largest labour organization in the United States. George Meany, who testified at the U.S. Senate union disclosure hearings said:

All of these [transparency] bills are based on...the *goldfish bowl* theory, the concept that reporting and public disclosure of union finances...will either eliminate or tend to discourage the abuses.... The AFL-CIO firmly believes this theory to be sound.

Even a former Liberal cabinet minister, Jean Lapierre, voiced his support for Bill C-377, stating:

Frankly, I agree with that bill because I think now every organization has to be transparent. The unions, a lot of times, have acted like they were private clubs. And so I think everybody should go to more transparency and I think that the initiative is welcomed by the membership and also by the public at large because why would you hide your financial statements if you get all those tax credits and what have you? So no, I think it's long overdue.

Canadian labour organizations receive over \$400 million every year in tax benefits. The union dues are tax deductible and all revenues are tax exempt. These tax-exempt funds, drawn from mandatory dues, are funnelled into a wide range of causes, many of which have nothing to do with the collective bargaining process.

Canadians have a right to know how their tax dollars are being used to influence public policy, since, unlike charities, no constraints are put on the political activities of labour organizations. Sadly, unions are able to force employees to pay for the funding of political parties and lobbying activities they do not even support. For example, the president of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada stated after the vote to merge his union with the CAW, “Can you imagine what it will mean to the CEP, the CAW when we're the first unionized party that governs a country?”

I think Canadians deserve to know how the so-called super-unions plan to use the hundreds of millions of dollars at their disposal to achieve that end.

Labour organizations, quite frankly, enjoy a more privileged position in our society and economy than any other entity, yet they have no public reporting requirements, unlike charities; publicly traded companies; federal, provincial, and municipal governments; government agencies; boards; crown corporations; first nation bands; foundations; political parties; and MP, senator, and MLA offices.

Bill C-4 also sets out to repeal Bill C-525, which was passed by our Conservative government. Bill C-525 required the holding of a secret ballot for the creation and abolition of trade unions. According to four surveys by Labour Watch, support for secret ballots ranged from 86% to 92% among currently unionized Canadians.

The proposed abolishment of a secret ballot is an attack on the democratic process. All members of Parliament are elected by secret ballot, so why take this away from unionized workers? How can the Prime Minister say this is undemocratic when he and his entire caucus were elected by secret ballot?

The sad reality for many union members is that professional union organizers exert unacceptable pressure on employees, give false information, and will even resort to fraudulently signing cards on behalf of employees in order to get signed cards. Only secret ballot votes can counter such tactics. How can the Liberal government argue that this is what the majority of union workers want?

John Farrell, executive director of the Federally Regulated Employers, Transportation and Communications, told the Senate that “A secret ballot vote is the essence of a true democratic choice and is entirely consistent with Canadian democratic principles.”

What is the problem? What is the issue? The Liberals want to be legitimized, so why are they taking this away? Without any credible rationale, or really any legitimate discussion with union members, the Liberal government is gutting two significant pieces of legislation that were a victory for union members.

Perhaps the motive for Bill C-4 is quite simple. This is an opportunity to repay the union leadership that helped get the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, an NDP MLA in Manitoba, elected.

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Bill C-4 goes against the principles of transparency and accountability. It goes against the fundamental principle of democracy: the secret ballot. It goes against the wishes of hard-working union members themselves. This is why I will be joining my Conservative colleagues in voting against Bill C-4.

•(1055)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to know why it is okay for members of Parliament basically to have a secret ballot in electing the Speaker, but the member suggested that the Liberals were elected on a secret ballot. I do not know if that is an inference that voters have to declare their political choice when they go to the ballot box, or that their choices be known. I ask this because all of us had that privilege of being elected via secret ballot, so people did not feel intimidated or did not feel they had to disclose their political choice at the end of the day, but we do that here. One of the member's colleagues passed a resolution in the House of Commons that we have a secret vote for the Speaker.

I would also ask why the Conservatives are opposed to making public the Board of Internal Economy. It hides in a shroud of secrecy, and the public should know. Why is it not proper to have minutes or the recordings of those deliberations open to the public?

Hon. Diane Finley: Madam Speaker, as members well know, every one of us in this chamber was elected by secret ballot. Our constituents go into voting booths behind cardboard frames so that no one can see their vote, and there are measures taken so that the ballot is folded and put into the ballot box without anyone else knowing how that person voted.

That is one of the fundamental principles of our democratic society. In fact, when we voted for the Speaker, we did that with a secret ballot. That was deemed acceptable. That was deemed, in fact, required, to preserve the anonymity of our vote.

What we are saying is that we have given that right to union members. We are asking the Liberal government not to take it away.

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to the presentation by the hon. member for Haldimand—Norfolk. In her speech there was a lot of talk about transparency and accountability in explaining why the opposition is against the passage of Bill C-4.

My question really is this. If, at the end of the day, this was such an important initiative when that member was in government, why did the Conservatives not, ultimately, have that initiative move forward as a government bill rather than allowing it to proceed by way of private members' legislation? As a government bill, it would have been subject to greater consultation with labour groups and workers, and all of the kinds of things that they were talking about rather than the government's bringing it forward under the cover of two private members' pieces of legislation.

•(1100)

Hon. Diane Finley: Madam Speaker, I am intrigued this morning by the conflicting statements of the Liberal government members.

First, just bringing forward the bill contradicts everything that the new Prime Minister has been touting about more openness, more transparency, more clarity, more accountability. They are saying,

“No, no, take that away, take away that transparency and clarity that was given to union members”, but they are also denigrating private members' bills.

Under our government, more private members' bills were passed than ever before in Canadian history, because we respect the members who want to bring forward those private members' bills. We also had more free votes within our party than any other party ever had, allowing our members to represent the wishes of their constituents.

Now, I notice that the Prime Minister has announced that certain controversial legislation coming forward will be heavily whipped on the Liberal side, the Prime Minister, again, who said that there would be more free votes, as long, perhaps, as they agreed with him.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for helping me understand this more clearly, because I found the debate around this issue very confusing.

We repeatedly hear from the other side that, for some reason, there is something sinister or wrong with democratically elected members passing a bill and that somehow it is wrong or unfair to workers to leave them alone with their conscience when they make a decision.

Hon. Diane Finley: Madam Speaker, I think it is important that we recognize what is happening with Bill C-4.

The Liberal government, despite its claims to want more openness, transparency, clarity, and accountability, is stripping union members of what they wanted. Roughly 85% of union members want financial disclosure; up to 90% want to be able to have a secret ballot.

Why on earth would the Liberal government take away that freedom, that accountability, they claim they want?

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to have this opportunity to speak in support of Bill C-4, which was introduced by the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour to repeal the legislative changes made in the previous Parliament by Bill C-377 and Bill C-525.

In the broader strokes, this particular bill ultimately aims to restore balance and a fairer approach in labour relations here in Canada. It seeks to restore the balance between employers, workers and, I would note, the government. This is ultimately what I found the most offensive part of the previous two private members' bills that were introduced and passed in the previous 41st Parliament, the notion of actually making sure there was a broad consultative process. From my perspective, because it was introduced as private members' legislation, it did not afford the same kind of opportunity that a piece of government legislation would have done. Had it been introduced by the government, the minister for employment would have been responsible for a broad consultative process with workers, labour unions, and other interested parties. Instead, it was done under private members' legislation.

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I listened to some of the earlier commentary that our concern about private members' legislation somehow demeans the value of such legislation. That is not the case. There are appropriate times and ways in which private members' legislation should be brought forth, but there is no guarantee under private members' legislation of the same opportunity for a broad consultative approach that can be done by way of a government bill. For us, the reasons for bringing forth Bill C-4 are not only that it was a campaign platform commitment, but more importantly that of making sure that we do things by way of broadly consulting all Canadians. From my perspective, the former Bills C-377 and C-525 seem to be solutions in search of a problem when there was not a fundamental problem.

The other issue I want to raise is that the fundamental outcome of this legislation being put forward was to freeze labour relations in Canada. At its core, this approach by the previous government was fundamentally flawed. If we are to effectively move our economy forward, we have to bring everyone together, rather than taking the approach of the previous government which sought to divide people. That, again, was at the fundamental heart of those two pieces of private members' legislation.

I would like to use my time today to discuss the details of these two pieces of legislation, why they would be repealed by this government, and what the ultimate impact might be on unions and workers. In turn, this will give Canadians a sense of the benefit of repealing the legislation, as we are proposing under Bill C-4.

Let me begin with Bill C-377. This private member's legislation was introduced by the former member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, Russ Hiebert. As I understood it, the purpose of the bill was essentially to force labour organizations and labour trusts to provide detailed financial and other information to the Canada Revenue Agency. That would include things like disclosure of salaries, time spent working on political and lobbying activities, and so forth.

From my perspective, the issue was not so much the disclosure but the fact it would apply only to labour unions. This information was not being required more broadly from other organizations, such as professional organizations. They were not asked to have the same standard of disclosure.

• (1105)

Therefore, from my perspective, that is somewhat problematic. While it might not seem, as framed by the members of the official opposition, that public disclosure is not unreasonable, if we really dig down deep into the particular issue, we will see there are some serious and substantive ramifications with their approach.

First, it creates an extra level of unnecessary and, ironically, by a government that was seeking to reduce red tape, a more bureaucratic process. The kinds of regulatory requirements that would be imposed upon smaller unions to comply with the requirements under Bill C-377 is particularly odious.

As well, the Canada Revenue Agency would also have to share this burden, multiplying the amount of the work the CRA would have to do. As a result, that cost burden would have been ultimately borne by all taxpayers.

The proposed changes were unnecessary because unions were already financially accountable to their members under the Canada Labour Code.

Provinces, in many instances, I believe in seven jurisdictions, indicated that this was also an encroachment on provincial jurisdiction. Many of them felt this legislation was potentially ultra vires of the provincial sphere. I find that ironic coming from that party, which talks so much about the importance of preserving the rights of provinces. This is already being regulated. Therefore, Bill C-377 imposes large financial and administrative burdens on labour organizations and labour trusts that were not ultimately required for others.

While the administrative burden and reporting requirements are significant, it would also have a chilling effect on the collective bargaining process and, potentially, give an unfair advantage to employers at the bargaining table because of the requirements of financial disclosure. For example, because of the nature of those disclosures, information about the strike funds of unions would potentially be available to employers. That same reciprocity does not exist for the unions; knowing the capacity of the employer to deal with a strike situation. As a result, the employer would have the advantage of knowing how long a union member might be able to be sustained in a strike position. It was not ultimately a function of an even application of so-called transparency in Bill C-377.

This brings me to Bill C-525. This was, of course, a private member's bill that was introduced by the current member for Red Deer—Lacombe. The bill basically attempts to make changes to the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, and the Public Service Labour Relations Act, which ultimately affects how unions are certified and decertified.

In a nutshell, that legislation was an attempt to make it more difficult for unions to ultimately get certification. It was not just problematic for unions, but also imposed some serious burdens on others as well. For example, there were real potential implications for a number of agencies, including the Canada Industrial Relations Board and the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board. These boards would have had to bear the additional administrative cost and logistical responsibilities in holding representation votes.

Under these changes, rather than under the CIRB's previous requirement to hold a vote to certify a union in roughly 20% of cases where less than a majority of workers have signed union cards, ultimately this would have meant a fivefold increase in work. Therefore, these bills are not a contribution to labour relations in Canada.

At the end of the day, these two pieces of legislation have done more harm to the nature of labour relations in Canada and they need to be repealed. I welcome the debate on this subject.

• (1110)

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased the member explained a lot of why the Liberals put forward Bill C-4. He clarified a lot of the confusion.

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He was pretty clear that accountability and transparency was great as long as it was easy. However, as soon as it was a burden on the CRA or the unions, then there would be pull-back on that. This explains a lot about the Liberals' platform moving forward in the last 100 days.

My colleague talked about how this would help move the economy forward, if we eliminated transparency and accountability, secret ballots, and those kinds of things. Does the member feel that eliminating the democratic process of secret ballots is somehow going to help unions and the government move the economy forward?

Mr. Arnold Chan: Madam Speaker, I share a common commitment with my friend, the member for Foothills. We both had the privilege of entering this place at the same time.

For me, the fundamental issue with respect to transparency and accountability was the nature in which the legislation was ultimately brought forward. It did not allow for broad consultation. It ultimately had the impact of actually chilling or making more difficult the nature of Canada labour relations.

When we are not all pulling together, unions, employers, workers, and government, at the end of the day we are going in opposite directions. That is not how we ultimately bring the Canadian economy forward.

If this were an important issue of openness and transparency, the Conservatives should have taken a fulsome approach of consulting with all the affected partners in this situation so they could have had that appropriate input, and everyone could have bought in to their scheme.

• (1115)

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I know that in my time in the riding, as I was knocking on doors during the campaign and after becoming the member for that area, I heard again and again from unions about their concerns, about their wanting to see these bills removed.

I am very happy to be standing here today saying that I will support moving in this right direction. However, there is still more work to be done.

For promised labour policy reform, will the Liberal government commit to reinstating a fair minimum wage in federally regulated sectors? I would like to hear the member's thoughts on this.

Mr. Arnold Chan: Madam Speaker, I am glad the third party will be supporting our position on Bill C-4. This was an important situation where we felt that the approach of the previous government was inappropriate and that we needed to have a restart in our relationship with organized labour.

As to the member's substantive question on the minimum wage, the member knows well this party's position. We supported the motion put forward by the NDP with respect to this.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is great to be back in the House. I spent a week in my riding, where I had the opportunity to speak with individuals and families who have been negatively affected by the previous government's bills.

[*English*]

I had the great pleasure of spending some time in the riding this past week, talking with individuals and families in Oromocto, family members of civilian employees at Canada's largest military training base, Base Gagetown. They are very pleased with the movement of the government to reset relations with unions and governments across the country.

I had a chance to talk with researchers working at our National Research Council as well as local firefighters. All were happy to see the movement of the government.

Could my colleague from Scarborough—Agincourt speak to some of the conversations he had throughout his constituency about the fairness this bill seeks to address?

Mr. Arnold Chan: Madam Speaker, during my constituency break, I had the opportunity to sit down with employers. They recognized that it was important to have a good working relationship with their labour unions. I think of a specific auto parts manufacturer that is struggling to ensure that it can work proactively to get goods to market.

It is important that we create the conditions that ultimately lead to strong employer-employee relations, as opposed to creating the kind of divisive policies we saw from the other side.

Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise in this House to speak in support of Bill C-4, and with it the repeal of Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. Bill C-4 is an important step forward and yet another example of this government following through on our promises.

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge that this is my first time rising in the House to speak in debate since being elected by the great people of Newmarket—Aurora. I want to thank the voters who placed their trust in me to represent them here in Ottawa.

I also want to thank the hundreds of volunteers who supported our campaign during the election. As a long-time resident of my community, I am truly honoured by this. I particularly want to thank my wife Andrea, and our two sons, without whom the success of the campaign would not have been possible.

I look forward to working with all members in this House in an effort to accomplish great things for our great country.

There is an important topic in front of us today, and that is Bill C-4. This government recognizes the important role that unions play in protecting the rights of Canadian workers and in helping to ensure a strong and prosperous middle class. Bill C-4 is an integral step to ensuring Canada's labour laws best foster positive and productive working relationships between employees and employers, an approach that strives for balance. If we look to Bills C-377 and C-525, the Employees' Voting Rights Act, it is clear that balance was not the objective.

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What is also clear is that a number of legitimate concerns were raised by stakeholders, which were ultimately ignored by the previous government. While it rushed to pass these bills just before the election for partisan gain and as a tool to punish unions, Bill C-4 would go a long way to restoring the fairness and balance that was lost under the previous bills. Not only did the legislation diminish and weaken Canada's labour movement, it was also counter-productive to ensuring a positive work environment. The bills were political gimmicks used for partisan gain and nothing more. They addressed no pressing problem, no great evil, and merely duplicated much of the legislation found in the Canada Labour Code and provincial regulations. We campaigned, and rightfully so, on repealing these hyperpartisan acts, and today we are closer to doing so.

It was clear from the beginning that Bill C-377 would create an unnecessary advantage for unions during collective bargaining, while Bill C-525 would make it more challenging to unionize and much easier for bargaining agents to be decertified. This meant that union members already facing challenging conditions when going through the collective bargaining process would have to tackle even more red tape and more uncertainty. This government wants to eliminate the unnecessary red tape and allow Canadians access to the kind of productive, positive working relationship between employees and employers that unions strive for and Canadians deserve. We will accomplish this through Bill C-4.

After the introduction of Bill C-377 by the last government, a number of high profile organizations were vocal about their opposition to it, including the Canadian Bar Association, the association representing police unions, and the federal Privacy Commissioner, to name a few. These organizations argued that Bill C-377 is ultimately an invasion of privacy for the significant number of people falling under its broad reporting requirements. Through several well-crafted and thoughtful, albeit ignored submissions, the Canadian Bar Association warned that this bill interferes with the internal administration and operations of a union, which is likely prohibited under the constitutional protection of freedom of association. Many provincial governments and employees agree, and the Alberta union of public employees launched a constitutional challenge against the legislation.

Beyond the likely unconstitutionality of Bill C-377, it would also be impractical to administer, including the high cost this would place on the Canada Revenue Agency to process the increased volume of disclosure. Though it is always easy to increase regulation or create more red tape, the costs, whether to the organization, or in this case to the government agency, can be significant and should not be overlooked. This is yet another reason to repeal this bill.

While the Conservatives wanted to increase the number of hoops for unions and their members to jump through, this government is committed to eliminating them.

To say that these bills were not a highly partisan move by the previous government would be false. All we need to do is look back over two years ago, when on June 26, 2013, a Friday afternoon just days before the summer recess, 16 Conservative senators broke ranks and voted to gut Bill C-377 and send the amended legislation back to this place. Parliament was prorogued before members of the House could deal with it, sending it back to the Senate without any

changes. It took another two years before the long reach of the former PMO finally managed to accomplish what it set out to do in the first place and the law came into force.

● (1120)

Aside from the large number of organizations that were quite vocal in their condemnation of Bill C-377, a number of provinces, seven to be exact, also stood in opposition to it. These provinces already implement strong and important requirements for financial disclosure among the unions. Duplicating these measures not only encroaches on the jurisdiction of these provinces but also creates undue adversity for unions. Above and beyond these duplications, Bill C-377 also goes a step further and requires labour organizations to disclose more information than required of any other organization. This unfair treatment would ultimately have severe consequences on how unions operate in serving their members. Our government wants to protect the role of the union on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who rely on them. Unions are a legitimate part of the Canadian economy and its social fabric.

Bill C-4 recognizes the concerns that were raised months and in some cases years ago, and addresses them by allowing the provinces to continue their work in their jurisdiction. Bill C-4 would also ensure that labour issues are free of the potential breaches of individual privacy rights that were so obviously threatened by Bill C-377. The provinces play an important role in securing the transparency and accountability of unions, and through the imposition of Bill C-377, labour units are thrust into unfair circumstances that make it challenging and sometimes impossible to be compliant.

Bill C-4 would clean up the mess that Bill C-377 left behind. It would restore balance to existing relations between unions and employers. It would get rid of the duplication of reporting requirements. It would remove the discriminatory nature of Bill C-377, and it would uphold the privacy of all parties.

This government has also been steadfast in its position on how best to rebalance the rights of workers and employers in Canada. Bill C-4 will be a welcome relief to the past government's back-door nature, exemplified by Bill C-525, a private member's bill that had no stakeholder consultation whatsoever yet will wield significant impact.

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Bill C-525's impact spreads deep, from the way unions can form to how they operate, and ultimately whether or not they can decertify. Bill C-525 put in place a requirement for a majority secret ballot vote by employees before any bargaining unit can be certified or decertified, a clear and obvious attack on unions by the previous government. By changing these thresholds under Bill C-525, not only did the previous government make it harder for bargaining agents to be certified, it made it easier for a bargaining agent to be decertified. Bill C-4 will go a long way to re-establishing a positive working relationship between employees and employers to allow for a more efficient, quicker process. Through the repeal of Bill C-525, I am proud to say that the certification process will be more efficient and more likely to be free of employer interference.

This government will work hard for the rights of workers and employers across Canada, and Bill C-4 is the first step in rectifying the partisan attacks on hard-working Canadians by the past government.

I am pleased that I have had the opportunity to discuss such an important bill, which affects over 18,000 labour entities in Canada, including locals found in my riding of Newmarket—Aurora. This government stood before Canadians last October and made a commitment to voters that if the Liberal Party formed government, Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 would be repealed. Well here we are, a little over 100 days later, doing exactly that. This is a government that believes in bargaining in good faith and that unions play an important and legitimate role in the success of our economy. I am proud to have this opportunity in the House to defend those rights and look forward to a productive and respectful working relationship with labour unions moving forward. I urge all members to do the right thing and support Bill C-4.

• (1125)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member opposite for his election and for a wonderful speech.

Taxpayers, though, are supporting half a billion dollars per year of credits related to union dues. Professional organizations and charities which are given those kind of tax breaks are providing financial transparency due to the requirements that they already have in place. Does the member not think that taxpayers have a right to know where the half a billion dollars a year in tax breaks for union dues goes? If he does think they have a right to know, why is he taking that right away?

• (1130)

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question, and I also want to thank her for welcoming me to the House and congratulating me on my speech.

Of course, that is an important issue, and people have a right to know where taxpayer money goes. The point is that the legitimacy, the transparency, and the openness are already there. The old bills create no new mechanisms. Reporting requirements were already there. All they do is make it harder for unions to operate and less likely that they will be able to thrive in this economy. That is the purpose of repealing these bills. I am happy to support Bill C-4. At the same time, we are supporting openness and transparency.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have been hearing this strange talk from the Conservatives about accountability and transparency. This is from a government that was the most secretive in Canadian history.

When we saw Bill C-377 go through, it was denounced by the Privacy Commissioner as an attack on the right to privacy. Conservatives are into the right to privacy when it comes to their friends, but we have a bill that was challenged for breaching the Constitution, breaching provincial laws, interfering with the right to organize, and was also attacked by the Privacy Commissioner.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague why he thinks the Conservatives, in their vendetta against their political enemies, would have thrown the important issue of the constitutional right to privacy out the window just so they could get at their political enemies. Do they still think they can stand up in the House and somehow credibly say they were on the side of accountability and trust?

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Madam Speaker, I share the member's sense of irony in hearing the new Conservative position about openness and transparency. This breach of privacy actually comes as a bit of a surprise from the Conservative benches. It is the same government, as we will recall, that rid Canada of its long-form census because it breached privacy in its opinion. Therefore, I do not understand why the Conservatives protect privacy rights on one hand and not on the other.

I also do not know why they did not have lawyers advising them. This would clearly be a constitutional breach on the privacy front as well as the right to freedom of association. In fact, part of me thinks the Conservatives probably knew that this would be challenged but they were doing it for a political gimmick for partisan gain. I am sure the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent would agree that this was an attack on unions. I know he appreciated that attack and that is perhaps why—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Through you, Madam Speaker, perhaps the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent failed to recognize that was an attack on the unions. In any event, it was an attack on the unions. That was what it was. The constitutionality of it was not considered properly.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would also like to welcome the member for Newmarket—Aurora.

It is interesting. I was hoping that they would be having a free vote on this. The Liberals talked about transparency and accountability, and yet they do not have free votes anymore.

I do not think they can afford it. They are collecting \$5.4 billion a year in fees, getting close to \$500 million in taxable benefit, and they do not want to have a vote, as we have to have, to get elected here or to be Speaker. I am wondering what part of the accountability you are missing when it is all about accountability and showing the taxpayers where their dollars are actually being spent.

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The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Before the answer, I want to remind the member that I am not missing any accountability and that he needs to address the Chair and not the member.

A very brief answer from the member for Newmarket—Aurora, please.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Madam Speaker, accountability is already there. Again, this is not a real argument. The accountability mechanisms in Bill C-377 go above and beyond anything that is reasonably necessary. I wonder why he thinks union members should have more accountability than members of Parliament when it comes to reporting their expenses.

As for a free vote, whether this is a free vote or not, I am happy to vote for Bill C-4. I welcome all the members opposite to have a free vote and join me in supporting Bill C-4 and helping unions prosper in our great economy.

• (1135)

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak against Bill C-4, which would roll back the rights of hard-working union members and repeal transparency legislation that finally allowed some sunshine to be let into the financial ledgers of opaque unions.

I respect the Minister of Employment. I have had the pleasure of getting to know her over the past 16 years and enjoyed the time we spent together in the Manitoba legislature. I remember that my hon. friend and her NDP colleagues at the time introduced a similar bill in 2000 and rammed it through the Manitoba legislature, a bill that massively favoured the interests of union elites and took away the ability of union members to stop their union dues paying for their union bosses' political agendas.

I also noted her comments in the House about how Bill C-4 would improve Canada's economy. I only pray that her now Liberal government does not increase Canada's debt by over 500% as her former NDP colleagues have done in Manitoba since her days in government. It is also interesting to note that at that time, former Liberal MP Jon Gerrard and leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party not only spoke against this legislation but he voted against it as well.

Today I want to talk about three things: first, the flawed motivation the Liberals have for introducing this legislation at this time; second, the importance of a secret ballot as a pillar of our democratic institutions; and third, the principle of fairness for certification and decertification.

The timing of this legislation leads me to believe that the new Liberal government is on manoeuvres. The fact that even the Liberal minister who introduced this legislation admitted that the bill was quickly tabled leads me to believe that ulterior motives are behind it.

It is too easy to just assume that this legislation is a reward for all the unions that backed the Liberals in the last election. Not even the Liberal government would change the law to remove mandatory secret ballots for union workers as a quick "thank you" to the unions that actively and publicly supported them but also spent thousands upon thousands if not millions of workers' dollars attacking the Conservative Party.

The big issue here is not Bill C-4 itself. It is not even Bill C-5, the bill the Liberals introduced next to settle their union debts. We have to look at the big picture here. It is not just that the Liberals owe some of their election victory to the thousands of workers' dollars the union spent against us, it is that the Liberals are using the rights of workers across the country as a bargaining chip, literally.

The lightning speed of the bill's introduction can only be explained by the looming spectre of collective bargaining the Liberals have coming with their own public service unions. Quite simply, they are trading the rights of hard-working Canadians in the hope of a smoother ride at their own negotiating table. It leads me to ask: did the Liberals care about union rank and file or only about making their own lives easier? It is clear that the Liberals are introducing this legislation for their own ends and not to solve a problem that actually exists.

This leads me to my second point: the importance of the secret ballot as a democratic principle. Each hon. member in the chamber is here today because residents in their ridings chose to give them the most personal thing they possess, their vote. We have no higher duty in our role as members than to safeguard the democratic principles that hold our country together. The secret ballot is the highest pillar of this process. It seems absurd to me that a member of the House could get up and argue that we need less voter protection, that we need less transparency, that we need less democracy. It seems absurd to me that a member of the House could get up and argue that we need more secrecy, that we need more union intimidation, and that we need more power for big union bosses.

The Liberals are creating a problem that does not exist. Nobody is banging down my door, nobody is calling my office, and nobody is emailing me saying they want workers to be stripped of the right to a secret ballot. Even the national president of the Public Service Alliance of Canada Robyn Benson said so much herself when she testified in committee in 2014, "Contrary to what you may have heard, PSAC has no issue with voting by secret ballot. We do it regularly to elect our officers, ratify collective agreements, and vote for strike action, as examples."

• (1140)

The old card check system allowed for a workplace to be unionized without letting all employees have their say. In fact, unionization could proceed with a significant portion of the workers having no idea unionization is even going on.

Government Orders

As many of my hon. colleagues will know from their experience in electoral campaigns, candidates often spend their time going door to door, asking for support of their friends and neighbours. Most say yes. Sometimes they mean it, and sometimes they just want them to get off the porch or do not feel comfortable saying no to their face. It is a good thing that candidates cannot force people to vote at the door when they are canvassing; otherwise, the potential for voter intimidation would be disturbing, indeed. It is a good thing we have a secret ballot vote later to decide who the MP will be.

The former card check system, without a mandatory secret ballot, was ripe for intimidation, intentional or not. In this system, workers could be pressured by unions or their colleagues in the signing of a union card. I ask colleagues to imagine what it feels like in a workplace full of tension, where a worker is on the fence about joining a union but is bombarded by peer pressure from all sides.

The only true way to safeguard the rights of these workers is to let them express their true wishes through a vote, and the only way to do this properly is through a secret ballot. This notion enjoys widespread support across Canada and 5 of 10 Canadian provinces have mandatory secret ballot vote legislation. The Liberals have absolutely no good reason to get rid of this vital check.

Finally, let me now turn to one specific detail in the bill, that which deals with the number of votes it takes to certify or decertify a union. Before Bill C-525, it took the signatures of 35% of the bargaining unit to trigger the process to certify a union, while it took 50% to decertify it.

Bill C-525 is grounded in the core principle of creating an equal and fair playing field for supporters and opponents of unionization. We believe that it should be up to the workers to decide, not the employers, and not the union bosses. This was achieved by setting the bar for both certification and decertification processes at 40%; a wholly reasonable number to trigger a vote that necessarily involves wide-ranging consultation.

Now, the Liberals are trying to narrow the circle of people that unions and employees need to involve to make decisions; ultimately, making the process less democratic.

The bill is all about narrowing the democratic legitimacy of unions and scaling back the rights of workers to select their representatives and to determine their own fate. It is truly an affront to democracy for elected members of this chamber to demand that other institutions in their country be made less democratic, that they be made more exclusive.

As the representative of the residents of Brandon—Souris, I cannot support the legislation. It is clearly designed to settle Liberal debts to unions from their last election campaign, to strip workers of their right to a secret ballot, and to create an uneven playing field for workers to determine their own fate.

I encourage all members of this House to vote against the bill.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, earlier the Liberals brought up the fact that the argument that Bill C-377 was about transparency was false. The unions already have a legal obligation to provide detailed financial statements. Bill C-377 does

not require anything or demand transparency from other professional associations, such as the Conseil du patronat du Québec, or chambers of commerce. This is a two-tiered approach.

As far as Bill C-525 is concerned, similar legislation was passed in the United States and the unionization rate dropped from 35% to 11%. Organized labour is the middle class and in Quebec that means teachers, nurses, bus drivers, and public servants.

Why are the Conservatives against the middle class?

• (1145)

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Madam Speaker, my colleague makes the very point that these workers are middle-class Canadian citizens and they work hard every day. Why should they not have the democratic right to a secret ballot to be in a union? I do not know what they are afraid of when 40% is all we were asking for in that bill to have a union.

However, for the mechanisms that the member is in favour of, to walk in and have a card-signing process, they may end up with over 50% of the individuals who sign up and could end up in a union while not even knowing that the unionization process was going on. That is what we see as unfair in this whole process.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Madam Speaker, I really enjoyed the comments from my colleague from Brandon—Souris, and I acknowledge the great work he is doing on this file.

I was in my riding this weekend and I was talking to my neighbour. He was talking about what the union did to intimidate him during one of the provincial elections in Saskatchewan. The union bosses came in and intimidated him. They said basically he needed to vote for a certain party and that his obligation as a union member was to vote for that party.

We look at the intimidation that was going on in a provincial election; now let us put it into ballot vote. Let us put it into the situation where they are going to certify or decertify a union. Can members imagine the intimidation that would be in that room in an open ballot? Can members imagine the intimidation that they would put on their members if the election were an open ballot?

I ask this of my colleague. In the scenario of a closed or secret ballot, what is the issue? That is how most democracies operate today. Why can the unions not operate in that same fashion?

Mr. Larry Maguire: Madam Speaker, that is the hub of what we are talking about here in this debate on Bill C-4, brought forward by the member for Kildonan—St. Paul.

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It is very true that the intimidation that I spoke about in my own remarks here is exactly why they need to have a secret ballot. Under the old mechanisms, a 35% sign-up gave them a union, but they had to have 50% to decertify a union. My colleague brought in Bill C-525, one of the first bills that I had the opportunity to speak to in this House. We levelled it at 40% either way, and that does still not even require half. It is a very fair piece of legislation that was on the books, and that is why I make the comment and the point that the Liberals are trying to fix something that is not broken.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, we support the government's proposed changes in response to the Conservatives' anti-union bills.

I represent a riding that has seen its share of companies close their doors. Workers now have increasingly precarious, part-time jobs through no fault of their own.

Does my colleague realize that to introduce a bill against unions is to be against workers?

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Madam Speaker, again that question makes the point that when they have a 35% sign-up to have a union and 50% to decertify, what was wrong with sawing that off at 40% to have a union or to decertify it?

I am not surprised that my colleague who just asked the question from the New Democratic Party agrees with this bill brought forward by the former NDP minister in Manitoba who is now the Liberal Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour in Canada. It looks to me like the Liberal government is trying to outflank the NDP on the left with this kind of legislation. It is certainly not fair to workers seeking union certification.

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank all of my colleagues who have spoken on the bill thus far.

This exercise is not so much about outlining the vision of the legislation that we have before us, but about untangling what has been tangled before. Therefore, we now find ourselves in this position where we are taking back two particular bills.

I will not specifically address the issue of private members' bills and how they are being used, whether for nefarious reasons or not. Personally, I respect private members' bills, no matter what they are. They are from a member and there is a reason they exist. However, I would like to attack these particular bills based on their policies and how they are unfair in this context.

Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 were bills that I did not support from the beginning. Therefore, we need to undo what has been done in order to proceed any further, and Bill C-4 would do just that.

Both Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 passed without the extensive consultation process traditionally used for labour relations law reform. This is what we call the tripartite way of doing things. We have the government, the union and organized labour and, of course, we have the employers, all of which need to be consulted on something as important as this, because it affects so many Canadians

across the country. Changes to labour relations legislation has always been preceded by this.

I have two examples of how this was done. I would like to bring these examples to the House because they illustrate the way things should be done using the tripartite process.

In 1995, the Sims task force did extensive public consultations on part 1 of the Canada Labour Code, and included labour, employers, and government stakeholders. The name of the report is "Seeking a Balance", which formed the basis of major changes that came into effect in 1999. Going further back to 1978, the second example I would like to use, was the Woods task force, which was another tripartite consultative process. It was used to bring about change to the federal industrial relations system.

However, with Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, there was not much consultation. I am not sure of all the work that the members did in response to these two bills, but I would assume that the opposition during the committee process both here in the House and in the Senate illustrates that a lot of consultation did not take place in this tripartite manner.

I will go to the part where the bill talks about some of the other non-labour practices of the former government. Of course, in many situations the Conservatives went against many of the unions and organized labour, and a result caused a very poisoned atmosphere over the past while. Whenever we heard the government talk about big union bosses and the like, it created a stir among organized labour and many governments, both provincial and here in Ottawa.

Here are some of the rules the Conservatives brought in: a requirement to provide information on the time spent by officers on political lobbying, which would then be made publicly available on the Canada Revenue Agency's website; and an obligation on unions to provide their financial statements to their own members for free and when they are asked for it.

This was almost a situation where the Conservatives wanted to create a solution to a problem that did not exist. They did so without the right amount of consultation and, as a result, neglected to see some of the steps that had been taken over the past 20 to 25 years by organized labour, employers and the associations they are represented by.

Bill C-377 was directed solely at labour organizations, and that was quite evident during the evidence that was given here in the House and in both House and Senate committees. It was directed at labour trusts and not at any other professional associations, which, by the way, benefited from similar treatment under the Income Tax Act, but they were not specifically told to be more transparent as well.

As hon. colleagues will recall, the Minister of National Revenue has waived the reporting requirements for 2016 in Bill C-377 knowing that we intend to work to repeal the bill.

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•(1150)

I will go back to the debate that took place, before we get into Bill C-4. When Bill C-377 went to the Senate, a colleague of ours by the name of Hugh Segal, a Conservative senator at the time, was vociferously against the bill, to the point where he had brought amendments that were accepted at the time. I will read an editorial he did after retiring from the Senate about how he was against Bill C-377 and its fundamental principles. I will quote from his editorial:

The Canadian Bar Association questioned its constitutionality, as it sought to circumvent normal provincial jurisdiction over labour relations and trade unions by imposing Canada Revenue Agency reporting requirements via federal statute.

There he talked about the constitutional crisis that had been raised by this particular situation. We can question the constitutionality of the bill as defined by the powers directed by the provincial governments and the federal government, which are laid out quite clearly.

Former Conservative Senator Hugh Segal went on to say:

There was also the issue raised by many witnesses before the committee that reporting relationships for small expenditures being imposed on unions and union locals were not being imposed on other corporate or charitable/not-for-profit groups.

We saw this in the House of Commons testimony as well, when witnesses talked about how the same onus was not put on other associations to divulge or make transparent the activities they do and the contributions they receive, including from whom, which really would have created a balance.

The imbalance during labour negotiations was also talked about and mentioned in Hugh Segal's article and the point was made that information would be divulged by local labour organizations to the point where it would put them at a distinct disadvantage in certain negotiations.

I want to thank him for doing that, because I thought that in earnest he had put together some very viable amendments. Let us face it, like every bill of this size, there are good points and there are bad points, but Conservative Senator Hugh Segal attempted to make amendments. I should not say "attempted", because he actually did make them. His amendments were accepted by members of the Senate, and then the bill was sent back here to the House for it to address it once more with those fixes in place. The House was prorogued.

Here, I know that everyone is just waiting to hear how this works, right? It is that type of day.

An hon. member: With bated breath.

Mr. Scott Simms: With bated breath, yes indeed, Madam Speaker.

When prorogation takes place, the bill resets and goes back to its original form. The bill in its original form then went back to the Senate, but Hugh Segal was not there, unfortunately. Therefore, it was passed in its original form, which is the reason why we are here today talking about Bill C-4 in this manner.

I want to talk about one of the situations my NDP colleague brought up earlier when it comes to transparency. I remember when a gentleman, an independent member of Parliament, Brent Rathgeber, had a private member's bill on transparency and the disclosure of

salaries, and so on and so forth. He specifically went after a couple of elements within the public discussion. He went after the CBC, wanting the disclosure of CBC salaries, and so on and so forth. There were some problems with the bill when it came to the CBC being quasi-competitive in the private sector, but he also talked about divulging or making transparent the salaries of people in government, including the salaries of the people who worked in the PMO, the Prime Minister's Office of the day, the Conservative Prime Minister.

The Conservatives amended the bill. Mr. Rathgeber's bill said that anyone making around \$150,000 should have their salary divulged. It was based on the sunshine list that exists in Ontario, which concerns anyone making more than \$150,000. The Conservatives amended it so that only someone making more than \$400,000 a year would have their salary disclosed. Anyone making less than that would not have their salary disclosed. As we say back home, "You are too cute by half, sir". The Conservatives were trying to protect their own.

It is funny that we have massive disclosure demanded from labour organizations, but when it came to the Conservative Prime Minister's Office, it was not the same standard. That is why we are here today.

I support Bill C-4 for the reason that it untangles the effects of the two private members' bills, despite the strong efforts by the two members who brought forward these private members' bills, a process that we still uphold here as honourable for each and every individual member. However, I disagree with them and therefore I would strongly urge all of us to vote in favour of Bill C-4.

•(1200)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it was interesting to hear the hon. member go on a bit of a tangent about sunshine lists and the disclosure of PMO salaries. There are interesting arguments to be made on both sides of that. I just want to clarify if he is in favour of the current Prime Minister's Office disclosing a sunshine list in the format he has talked about. Will the Liberal government bring forward the sunshine list legislation he is praising in his remarks?

Mr. Scott Simms: Madam Speaker, I am always in favour of transparency. I would never turn it down. Anyone who works around here should have full disclosure on this. That is my view personally. I do believe in that.

As a matter of fact, I was referring to Mr. Rathgeber's bill. I point towards his chair because that is where he used to sit. He was an hon. member, a very smart man, and he worked very hard. What he tried to do was put more disclosure on certain aspects of governance. He pointed out the hypocrisy that tends to occur in this place, small or large, and that was happening at the time. Demanding transparency of one group includes transparency for all.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, I support what my colleague has to say in favour of workers' rights and improving their working conditions.

Government Orders

Before becoming a member of Parliament, I was a proud provincial public servant. I have a great deal of respect for all public servants, who work daily for the common good. I think the best way to send a clear message is to lead by example.

Accordingly, in the current negotiations with public servants, will my colleague ask the government to restore public service sick leave and adopt the provisions with regard to health and better working conditions?

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Simms: Madam Speaker, obviously, with regard to what she is talking about right now, we will let the discussions unfold. I have always had a deep respect for public sector workers. I have always had respect for them, their remuneration, and anything dealing with the benefits they receive. Yes, I do. It is a negotiation between the government and the union. I realize that. I will leave that at what it is right now and speak about it later when the time comes to vote on that particular legislation.

What I am focused on right now is untangling the mess in Bill C-4, and I thank the member for her comments about it. She supports Bill C-4, and I appreciate that support for all the reasons we do: the injustices in the particular provisions contained within Bill C-377 and Bill C-525.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his very astute comments. I appreciate hearing the history of this place. For those of us who are new, sometimes it is very elucidating.

One of the things I most appreciated about his remarks was his comment about the balance between labour, corporations, and government. Neither side is all right or all wrong, and I do not like it when people say they are doing something because they are pro labour or against labour. We all have to find a proper balance.

If he could, I would like the hon. member to expand on where he sees a proper balance being.

Mr. Scott Simms: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his astute comments as well, as we trade all kinds of compliments between each other.

In the spirit of this massive love-in that we embarked on, yes, we are talking about the love-in as well when it comes to these particular tripartite negotiations. That is what he talked about: the businesses, the employers, organized labour and, of course, government. He also pointed out that we want to avoid what happened last time with sweeping generalizations about who we are as groups.

Many times I have heard people say that they do not really like unions or they are all for unions. We must have a conversation that looks at and accentuates the wonderful things they do, and if we have disagreements, bring them here to the House.

My other hon. colleague pointed out the situation with sick leave. It is a valid point. We know there will be disagreements. We have to look at the books as they are and the fiscal balance that we hope to achieve, and that is why we cannot use sweeping generalizations anymore with terms like “big union bosses” or “corporate bosses”, and the like. If we go that way, we will all sound like Donald Trump, and wouldn't that be a bad thing?

●(1205)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is hard to follow up with the reference to Donald Trump in this chamber. I will leave it at that.

I would like to refer to Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. The Conservatives often attached names to their bills. Basically these were known as bills to create two straw men. It was really an attempt to create an issue that had not existed and they sought a solution to a problem that did not exist. I say that because unions and corporations are barred from political donations.

Former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien brought this to the House, and it was something that I and my colleagues supported. It has been a good way going forward, and has been replicated by provincial NDP governments to ensure ordinary voters and citizens have as much of an impact on the voting process as larger and medium-sized corporations, big unions, and small unions do.

Another good change I saw was the limitations put on some of the lobbying activity that took place related to those donations. I often saw, through TPP grants, a former program, the government of the day, either the Conservatives or the Liberals, would have large grant donations go to companies under the TPP program. Those companies then would spend hundreds of millions of dollars in donations to the party. That was a bad practice.

Another bad practice was related to the funds that members of Parliament were allowed to keep in secrecy, different from the riding association. In the past a number of different MPs were able to accumulate funds independently. That has changed as well.

Those contributions, be it political, union, or corporate donations, are gone. Those were good, credible movements made by former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. I give him credit for that because this is a better place and more reflective of the people.

With regard to the tone we heard from union bosses, this is nothing more than passive aggressive attacks on their institutions and Canadians who are democratically elected to their positions through their membership, and membership reviews. In fact, if the union collectively bargains for an agreement and the membership turns it down, it could then remove the leadership for the collective bargaining.

Sometimes it is done voluntarily, when the leadership recognizes it has missed the point from the workers. Most recently, we saw this take place in Ontario with public servants of correctional facilities. An agreement was turned down, and the message to the union negotiators, including the executive, was that greater accountability was needed and not enough was being done to win their support.

There are processes in place for accountability. Union members can get annual reports.

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I would like to talk a little about some big union bosses, Rob from CUPE Local 82 and Dino from Unifor Local 444. We had a skate and donate program. CUPE Local 82 members took Family Day off and volunteered to help raise money for a local women's shelter and our downtown mission. I was fortunate to get two children's bicycles from Unifor Local 444. There were no complaints whatsoever. There were non-union, union, and other people from the not-for-profit sector there. We tripled our donations for those organizations and food banks. We also brought in triple the amount of food.

• (1210)

Big union bosses contribute so much on a regular basis to social justice causes; everything from refugees to a number of different programs, including food banks. They hold press conferences. Local 200 donates to eight children's groups. This is in the *Windsor Star*. It is in the public. All the members from local 200 are Ford workers. They have had a struggle with this economy. It is because of their quality of work that we have not lost more jobs. We have seen the failed practices of Liberal governments in the past and the former Conservative government with respect to the auto industry, which shrank from number two in the world in assembly to number eight.

Despite that, we have investment taking place because the members of the unions are good workers and they run a series of health and safety programs to ensure injury reduction in the workplace. Unions have bargained for those rights to increase the productivity of the workers. Because of that, without any government investment at all, Fiat has invested in the Windsor Chrysler assembly plant. It is now hiring 1,000 workers to increase production for the new minivan now known as the Pacifica.

Despite the economic conditions, this plant is the number one manufacturing facility since World War II. It has been operating now for over 10 years on three shifts, and has been making money for the company, rescuing it at different times. As well, the unions have been donating money on a regular basis. Members know this because it has been in the paper. Local 200 has given to the autism society of Windsor and Essex, the Bulimia Anorexia Nervosa Association, the Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Child Abuse Prevention Portal, Computers for Kids, Childhood Leukemia Foundation, Canadian Mental Health Association, Griefworks children's program, Jumpstart, and the Sunshine Foundation Dreams for Kids.

This is not only published in the *Windsor Star*, but it also is also publicized in the general media through TV and radio. Therefore, union members know exactly what is taking place because they are tuned in. We have had long-standing representation from their executives, but they have had to win their workers over. That is done mostly through the confidence in their collective bargaining agreement and through their actions in the public.

There are hundreds of thousands of dollars locally in my community, and I am proud to say I have a union town. The hypocrisy about this is when we talk about secret votes. Let us set the record straight. Unions are not allowed secret votes, but it is okay for members of Parliament to have a secret vote to elect a Speaker. There is no problem with that. We have the Board of Internal Economy committee. We hunker down behind closed doors and nothing goes public, and that is okay. We have different rules.

When I was a city councillor, and that was a while ago, we could only go in camera, or behind closed doors when the public and media were excluded, for issues related to property, personnel, and conflict of interest. There were very specific rules. However, what I have seen in my years here is that if somebody sneezes, the committee can go in camera. It is a ridiculous process and it shuts the doors to accountability. Although the taping continues, we cannot make the information public later on. Members can access it to listen to the proceedings, but they cannot talk about it. It is outrageous that this hypocrisy takes place.

Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 trample on a number of different rights, which are often looked at by experts as constitutionally unacceptable. Most important, they will also cost Canadian taxpayers over \$20 million just to instate a program and an additional \$5 million for one bill alone. It is a cost that should not be accepted. Therefore, I and my colleagues support Bill C-4.

• (1215)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to the member's speech. He kind of railed against the term "big union bosses". However, would he respond to the words of his former colleague, Ryan Cleary, the former NDP MP for St. John's South—Mount Pearl? In his recent blog post, which appeared in the *Newfoundland Herald* this week, he said, "As a NDP MP, for example, there was an unspoken rule that I could not take a public stand on a fishery issue without first running it by the [Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union]".

When he talks about transparency and accountability, does the member think that is what he is referring to? Is that the NDP mantra, that any public stand members take in their constituency or for the portfolios to which they are assigned must first be run through the union, which, in the case of Ryan Cleary, was the FFAW? Does he have a similar arrangement that he would like to share with the House? Is Mr. Cleary not telling the truth, or what is the big union boss relationship with the NDP?

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, no, I do not have that with the unions, but I do consult, just like I consult with industry, on a regular basis when an issue comes up that is related to them.

I would remind the member that Ryan Cleary ran as a Conservative candidate in the last election and failed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Madam Speaker, I really liked my colleague's comments, especially those about the Board of Internal Economy. However, my question is about another matter. My colleague spoke quite a bit about the social justice efforts of the big union bosses, but I would like to go back to the democratic aspect that he also touched on.

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At a meeting of several union representatives of my labour union, the treasurer put forward a budget that would increase union dues. I am not referring to my local, but to the national union. The members voted against that budget. The executive then withdrew, but came back half an hour later with another budget, which was approved. I find that this process is very democratic.

Has my colleague been in similar situations involving big union bosses?

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse: It is, Madam Speaker, and that is what takes place. There are those opportunities to do those types of double-checks within their own system and determine what they feel is appropriate as members to participate in the activity that the unions choose.

Nobody likes to have money taken off their paycheque, but for a long time a lot of union members have known this practice and have participated in it. They have ensured that the money is spent in accountable ways. The membership, again, has the opportunity to see the books whenever it wants. That is an open, accountable system. Members also get a chance to vote on their leadership and on their collective bargaining agreements to decide whether it is appropriate. They have plenty of opportunities in those elements.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it was encouraging to hear the member speak about getting union money out of politics as a positive thing. Of course, he knows that union money is not completely out of politics. In fact, it plays a major role not only at the provincial level, but also at the federal level in terms of pre-writ advertising.

Is the member supportive, broadly speaking, of preventing mandatory dues from being diverted to fund political causes unrelated to workplace needs?

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, our skate and family day was a free event for the constituents, during which two bikes, a boy's and a girl's, worth \$200 were donated as was food for the food bank. CUPE Local 82 members volunteered their time for this event, which was greatly supported. I encourage more members to partner to make these things happen. Union involvement with charities across the country is significant.

The member knows that they have an opportunity to change their dues as mentioned in a previous question. Perhaps he was listening.

● (1220)

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Madam Speaker, thank you for letting me have the opportunity to speak today. This is the first time I have risen to speak in debate. I first want to thank voters in my riding of Saint John—Rothesay for electing me. They elected me with a very strong mandate, almost 50% of the vote. I certainly want to acknowledge and thank the great MPs who ran and served in my riding before me: Rodney Weston, Paul Zed, Elsie Wayne, Gerry Merrithew, to name a few. This is a matter of note too. I am the third Liberal MP to serve in Saint John—Rothesay in the riding's history, so I am very honoured by that.

I also want to thank my great campaign team and my campaign managers, Warren Coombs and Warren Long, for their leadership in

helping me along the way; and I certainly want to thank my constituents very much.

I was elected on a mandate to stand up for Canada's marginalized and middle class. The past 10 years of the Conservatives' attempts to degrade, demoralize, and dismantle unions cannot continue. That is what Bill C-4 begins to do.

I would like to begin my speech today by highlighting the proud history of unions in my riding of Saint John—Rothesay. We are the first incorporated city in Canada. I am tremendously proud to represent Saint John—Rothesay in the House.

In 1851, believe it or not, Saint John stood as the third largest city in British North America, with a population of 31,000. Saint John was led by the hands of merchants, financiers, railroad men, and most importantly and significantly, shipbuilders, envisioning a prosperous economic centre. At this time, business in our great city flourished, pioneered by the shipbuilding and rail community. Saint John was a stronghold for trade unions. With united and well-represented tradespeople, Saint John was a perfect example of how unions can positively contribute to our communities. Let us not forget that it was unions that built the middle class of our country. It is unions that protect the workers. It is also the Liberal Party of Canada that is standing up for the middle class.

Saint John was a perfect example of how unions can positively contribute to our communities. As a cornerstone of business, unions created a strong and vibrant middle class that built an unrivalled shipbuilding and trade hub for Saint John.

As Saint John proved that the strength of our economy relies on the middle class, bills like Bill C-377 and C-525, and the proposed amendment from across the floor, weaken the labour movement and hold back Canadian potential. The bills must be repealed.

In 2016, unions continue to play a vital role in my riding's economy. I stand up for, and will continue to stand up for, local unions such as our local firefighters union, police union, IBEW, the Public Service Alliance, and many more. We are a union city. That is exactly what Bill C-4 does. It stands up for unions, Canadian workers, and most importantly, Canada's middle class. It is why I wholeheartedly disagree with the amendment presented by the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent, and I stand with the government in supporting Bill C-4 as currently written.

Bill C-4 should be supported by all members, without the proposed amendment, for two reasons. Bill C-377 creates unnecessary red tape for unions. Bill C-525 was supported without evidence, and neither unions nor employers wanted it. The amendment only seeks to undermine the purpose of Bill C-4, by pitting employers against employees.

At the time, the Conservative government claimed Bill C-377 was in large part justifiable due to the complaints received from union members. Let us be clear. These complaints represented 0.0002% of the over 4 million union members in Canada, while pre-existing legislation from both provincial and federal governments already required unions to issue financial reports and make them available to members.

• (1225)

This did two things. It created a massive unnecessary administrative burden as well as put unions at a major disadvantage during collective bargaining, making it more difficult for unions to influence the Canadian labour landscape. That is not what this government is about. In fact, it was the right hon. member for Calgary Heritage who stated in January of 2011: “Cutting red tape is a most effective way to show that we are making government work for people, not the other way around.”

The opposition could not justify support for Bill C-377 then, and it cannot justify it with these proposed amendments.

The amendment presented before the House speaks specifically to Bill C-525 and the certification and decertification of unions. This amendment seeks to oppose the exact goal of this bill. It cites legislation that was baseless and without evidence in 2014 and continues to be so in 2016. Bill C-525 was presented on the basis of consultations with labour unions and employers. However, neither employers nor unions sought out these changes or identified a single problem in the process in relation to this amendment.

Opposing this amendment upholds the commitment of our government to building evidence-based policy. If the Conservatives ever looked at considering the evidence, they would have found that their so-called mountain of complaints, which is how it was described at the time, was a whopping six complaints out of 4,000 decisions the Canada Industrial Relations Board made in the past 10 years. Although I am not a member from British Columbia, six out of 4,000 does not seem to be a very big mountain.

This amendment states:

...the bill violates a fundamental principle of democracy by abolishing the provision that the certification and decertification of a bargaining agent must be achieved by a secret ballot vote-based majority.

In fact, it does the complete opposite.

This amendment promotes a system that unions in Saint John—Rothesay and across the country agree has not been working well.

Bill C-525 eliminated card-check certification and added an unnecessary second step for certification. It has become an invitation for employers to interfere with the democratic right of workers to choose representation. Amendments made to this bill in 2014, went even further on the Conservatives' assault of democracy and the attack on unions by further lowering the threshold for decertification

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applications to reach a vote. It undermines collective bargaining and, to be clear, the Canadian labour movement.

I would like to clarify what the secret ballot vote-based majority discussed in the amendment actually means. It requires any organization seeking certification as a bargaining agent to enter into mandatory voting and replaces the card check system whereby employees voice their willingness to form a union by signing a union card. In the system imposed by Bill C-525, unions require support from 50% of all employees instead of 50% of the employees who voted. If we were to apply this same logic to the 2011 election, which elected the previous Conservative government, it would have received only 23.6% of the vote, not even half of what is now required to form a union.

Numerous unions from my riding have voiced their opposition to Bill C-525, arguing that the card-check certification model is quicker, more efficient, and more likely to be free of interference.

In conclusion, as the member of Parliament from a community with a proven union track record, I unequivocally support Bill C-4 without the presented amendments. This amendment is just like Bill C-525, which is a complete assault on unions and especially employees. It has created a diluted form of democracy that gives employers too much influence over the creation of a union, and attempts to fix a problem that never existed, and is based on evidence never existed.

I am standing up for unions, and for the unions in Saint John—Rothesay, by saying no to this amendment and yes to evidence-based policies.

In closing, I would like to thank union leaders like Dave Stevens, Peter Anderson, Abel Leblanc, Pat Riley, Chuck Hickey, Darlene Bambridge, Debbie Ferguson, and other great people in the riding of Saint John—Rothesay, for taking a leadership position and helping unions grow in Saint John—Rothesay.

• (1230)

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I found a couple of things the member said interesting. He had time to thank union leaders, but I did not hear him thank any union members in his riding. It might also be important to speak to them before he supports Bill C-4.

We heard a lot from the member's Liberal colleagues today that for some reason a private member's bill is illegitimate, that it does not really mean anything, that if it does not come from a minister or if it is not a government bill then it really has no weight. I am curious. As a backbencher and a new member of Parliament himself, does he agree with the statement that you have no voice and you will likely not have a private member's bill because your party does not believe in them?

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The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just want to remind the member that you are to address the chair, and I do have a voice.

The hon. member for Saint John—Rothesay.

Mr. Wayne Long: Madam Speaker, I am a backbencher and I am new to politics. I certainly believe that everybody has a voice and everybody should have a say in what happens.

I did mention that there are a lot of union leaders in Saint John—Rothesay, but a lot of my good friends are hard-working union members. Whether union leadership or union members, it was pretty much unanimous that Bill C-525 and Bill C-377 were not popular in unions. They were designed as bills that were detrimental to unions. That is why a lot of people in Saint John—Rothesay supported me.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is interesting today to watch our Conservative colleagues suddenly showing their great love for unions. Over the last eight years I have just heard ridicule and attacks on organized labour from that lot. To suggest that they are friends of unions is almost as ridiculous as saying that their legislation always met the standards of the Constitution. This was legislation that was brought in by Peter MacKay, the former justice minister, who had more recalls than the Ford Pinto.

The Conservatives believe that they can use the House and legislation to ignore the Constitution, to override privacy rights, to ignore provincial legislation just so they can get at their political enemies, the big straw men that they have created: the big Indian chiefs; the big, bad union bosses; radical environmentalists. We hear the trioka of blither from them consistently about their straw enemies. The fact that they would use legislation that is not charter-compliant in an attempt to attack their enemies actually debases the House. Whether the new government ended the legislation or it was ended in the courts, it would still be ended one way or the other, just like so much of the legislation that they brought in, which they knew was not charter-compliant, which they knew overstepped their bounds and debased the role of Parliament, which is to create credible legislation.

What does my colleague think is in the pathology of the Conservatives' minds that makes them believe they can ignore these clear jurisdictional divides that are supposed to keep government in check?

Mr. Wayne Long: Madam Speaker, I am new to politics. I grew up in a non-union house. My dad's whole career was with a local lumber company in Saint John that was not unionized. I learned first-hand and learned from going door to door that unions are good for the economy, they are good to grow the middle class, and they are there to protect workers.

With respect to the statements by members opposite about the party opposite, I am not sure where the attack on unionized workers started and where it ended, or whether it evolved over 10 years. Whether the party opposite agrees with that or not, that was a fact. I heard time and time again, at door after door, from union workers who told me that the Conservative government was out to get them. I learned growing up that perception can be reality at times, and there was a perception across Canada that the Conservative government

was anti-union, and that is something those members are going to have to live with. They saw the results of that in the election.

• (1235)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have been struggling to find some rational reason why the Liberals have decided to introduce Bill C-4 to repeal Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 without any chance of allowing both bills to be tested over time.

I was a proud member of the International Association of Firefighters prior to being elected to this chamber. I started my union involvement early in my career, becoming an executive officer and secretary of our association. After a period of raising our children, I became president of our local for three years. I contributed to our provincial and international association, lobbying on behalf of firefighters and their families with all levels of government.

Our association talked about our issues to those in office and we were appreciative of the time they gave us. We hoped our talks with politicians would be in the backs of their minds when the issues came up, not just in caucus, but around the cabinet table. Political action at the time was more about education than it was about influence. There was no political action funding, no well to draw from, and it was simply a matter of working hard to have our issues understood.

As an association, we strove for better understanding and better agreements for our members. Our members came first. Now, as a member of the House, my focus does not differ. I serve in the House for the best interests of my constituents, many of whom are union members.

Last year, a Forum Research poll showed 62% of Canadians approved of Bill C-377, while only 18% disapproved of it. I am assuming that many who were asked are also union members. The survey also revealed an appetite for even greater transparency with 78% of those surveyed saying they would like to see the bill expanded to include employer groups like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers.

The labour strategy has evolved. We realize that we can actually influence the decision makers beyond just education. We can actually help candidates and now parties win campaigns.

By funding campaigns with targeted political action funding, we were having an impact. When we started, there was little accounting of how much our union dues were being used for this activity. However, as the request for more direct funding was made, we were able to account for just how much funding was being directed to a political activity and it was quite a lot of money. With the ability to finance massive negative advertising campaigns against a candidate or party, a union's influence has increased exponentially in the modern political age.

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Political action funding targeted directly to influence election campaigns is widespread and whether this type of engagement is ratified by the membership at large has become inconsequential.

Prior to Bill C-377, there was virtually no accounting of how much of our union dues were being used for this type of blatantly partisan political activity. To see the effect PAC funding has had, one only has to look back some 15 years in Ontario to see why this is happening now more than ever. As partners of the Liberal government in Ontario, unions have had their way with the government because the borrower is always servant to the lender. They have had the Liberal government's ear and have influenced a vast array of policies and yes, even the outcome of elections in spite of the fact that many union members do not agree with what party that money is supporting.

The unions spend over the airwaves in the 2014 Ontario election should make any member of the House and members from legislatures and assemblies from coast to coast to coast blush and take notice.

Members of the House, legislatures, assemblies, and in fact unions across Canada should also heed a strong warning and look at the problems that support for a Liberal government has had on its union members in Ontario.

Failed government policies have resulted in plant closures and lost jobs, lower wages and benefits, and have caused many job and wealth creators to leave the province. Failed government policy has also resulted in choking debt and deficits. That has impacted union members in Ontario with cuts in health services and has impacted their quality of life.

I would humbly suggest that the biggest threat to the union movement and its workers in this country is not Bill C-377, but rather bad government policies. It appears that the federal Liberal government is on the same path as Ontario.

● (1240)

The repealing of Bill C-377 is nothing more than payback for the help the Liberals received this fall. Bill C-377 sought to establish mechanisms of transparency and accountability. I have heard the arguments against it, but the question is a simple one: What is wrong with being transparent and accountable?

A good friend of mine and former member of the House once told me that there is no monopoly on a good idea. The need for transparency in our institutions should be universally accepted in the House no matter which team we play for. Transparency is a good idea and it needs to continue to be one of the hallmarks of our Canadian democracy. It should be about what is good for all workers, and that includes trade unions. Canadian taxpayers accord individual union members deductions to support their unions under the Income Tax Act, that same deduction I benefited from as a union member for 30 and a half years.

What is wrong with transparency and disclosure? I suggest the only thing wrong with transparency and disclosure is if there is something to hide. During the election, because I was a candidate for a party that brought in Bill C-377, I heard from many fellow union members, who had been hearing from their executive and leadership how bad Bill C-377 was for labour. When I asked the members of

my union and others I ran into at the door what was so bad about it, the only answer they could come up with was that it was intended to bust unions.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Laws similar to the one brought in by the previous government exist in other countries and the union movement in those countries has not been busted. Repealing Bill C-377 does not promote an open and transparent system. Quite the contrary, it puts unions and union leaders back in the shadows, keeps memberships in the dark, and does not follow the principles of our democracy.

On the issue of Bill C-525, union certification and decertification votes can be highly charged political events that can cause union members to be intimidated by a process that exposes one's views. It can cause stress and fracture relationships. Why should they not be held in secret ballots and why should someone not have the right to keep their views tightly held to them, and them alone? Bill C-525 eliminated coercion, removed intimidation, and mirrored the right of every Canadian who casts a ballot to be entitled to cast their votes in secret and to vote with their conscience.

On February 3, 2016, my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent asked a question in the House of the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour and she responded on behalf of the Liberal government. He asked, "Yesterday the Prime Minister said, in answering a question I asked him, that Bill C-525 is undemocratic. Can the minister explain to this House how it could be undemocratic to have a secret-ballot vote?"

Her answer to the chamber was, "it is undemocratic because the process used by the previous government did not include consultation. They did not go out into our community and apparently did not even consult with employers."

How much consultation has the government held on repealing these acts other than to meet with those writing big cheques to the Liberal Party caucus? How much consideration is being given to allow fairly recent legislation to take root?

The U.S. passed a union transparency law in 1959, the labour-management reporting and disclosure act, or, as it was better known at the time, the union members' bill of rights. The act was intended to protect and promote democratic processes and democratic rights of union members, including the freedom to vote at meetings, to express any argument or opinions, and to voice views upon union candidates and union business. The legislation stood the test of time for nearly 40 years, before Congress made some amendments to modernize it.

The bill before the House today is not sound legislation. It is more about paying back political favours and less about the strength of unions in this country. It is not in the best interests of Canadians, and I urge all members of the House to see it for what it is and reject it as a step backward.

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• (1245)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the presentation by my colleague. Much of it focused on openness, transparency, and disclosure. He posed the rhetorical question of why the government would be against openness and transparency and, of course, it is not. This bill has nothing to do with openness and transparency.

Liberals put forward an amendment. If this was not an attack on labour, if this was about openness and transparency, if it is a good thing, it should be good for them. Everybody benefits from a tax deduction of dues paid, such as professional organizations, lawyers, doctors, chambers of commerce, CFIB members. They are all tax deductible.

However, the member's Conservative government voted against that amendment, against openness and transparency. How can he square that with the whole charade about openness and transparency when it was only unions that would fall under this legislation?

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, with respect, one does not have to be a member of those organizations. If there is a unionized workplace, one has to be a member of that unionized workplace. Therefore, I would suggest that there is no way that the current government is open and transparent when it looks at repealing the bill right off the bat. There is no way the Liberals are like that.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Barrie—Innisfil started out by quoting a polling, suggesting that most people supported Bill C-377 and in fact wanted it extended to employer organizations. I could ask the hon. member who paid for that polling, but instead, if for argument's sake we accept that is true, then why did the former Conservative government not apply Bill C-377 to these employer organizations?

The answer we seem to be getting from the Conservatives is that those organizations are voluntary and only unions are mandatory. However, if one wants to work as a doctor, one has to join the Medical Association and has to pay dues. Those dues are tax deductible, just like a union. If one wants to practise as a lawyer, one has to join the Bar Association and has to pay dues to the Bar Association. Those dues are tax deductible.

I want to give the member for Barrie—Innisfil another chance to answer the question of why Bill C-377 was only imposed on trade unions.

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, when I look at Bill C-377, I look at the issue of transparency and accountability. I think the members of the previous government did a very good job at making sure that the union members were aware of where their money was going and how it was being spent. This was what it was about. I do not begrudge that.

I find it kind of funny that the hon. member would be talking about polling, and our polling, when in fact they are the ones who do most of the polling to find out exactly how people are thinking.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not anti-union. My father was a CAW worker for 35 years, my mother and daughter are both part of the teachers' union, and I was married to a welder from local 663.

However, many union workers before Bill C-377 were upset that many unions received their member dues and were spending them to support the NDP without a secret ballot to get a majority vote.

My question for the member is: Does he see anything in Bill C-4 that would protect the rights of union members?

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, I do not see anything that would protect the rights of union members. In fact, in a lot of cases, the money that is being spent by union leaders across this country is really unknown, and not even at the grassroots union membership level do they have the ability to find that information out.

I would also suggest that one of the challenges with this is the fact that a lot of the money that is being spent is not going to who the actual union members are supporting. It is actually going to other parties that those union workers do not support.

• (1250)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to join in this debate today.

Governing is all about seeking a balance between things like the environment and the economy, between one part of the country and another, between social and economic values, and between labour and business.

I do not believe there has been any government in recent history that has thrown so many things out of balance, allowing ideology to trump evidence and political expediency to replace due process, than the previous Conservative government. Such has been the case in its actions towards labour relations and workers' rights in this country.

After years of attacks on fundamental labour rights, it is very gratifying that one of the first acts our government is doing is restoring fair and balanced labour laws that respect the integral role played by unions and their importance to a strong middle class and a fair and prosperous society.

Labour law systems are very complex. The ones that work well are based on a delicate balance between the interests of labour and management that must be respected if and when reforms are made. The federal labour relations system is well regarded and supported by both labour and employers, as the result of a genuine and proven consultative and consensus process that has been followed for decades in amending labour laws.

One of the most comprehensive changes in recent history to part I of the Canada Labour Code was the result of a full consultative process. It was chaired by the well-respected labour neutral, Andrew Sims, who produced a report entitled "Seeking a Balance". Mr. Sims said that if labour law is to be changed, it should be because of two things. It should be because there is a demonstrated need due to the legislation no longer working or serving the public's interest, or done on a consensus basis.

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There are perhaps no greater examples of how the previous government showed contempt for these principles and upset the labour relations balance than the two private members' bills that Bill C-4 seeks to repeal. Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 were deeply ideological and highly partisan pieces of legislation that served no public good or policy objective. Their sole purpose was to diminish and weaken the labour movement in this country.

These types of labour policies, based on ideology rather than evidence, produce unstable labour laws that hurt, not help, the interests of employers, employees, and the economy in the long term.

Bill C-377 was badly crafted and is fundamentally flawed legislation that made unprecedented and unwarranted disclosure about unions and their members, as well as other organizations that do business with unions, based on no demonstrated need for this law.

Constitutional experts have said it was unconstitutional. Privacy experts believe it will violate privacy rights of millions of Canadians. Seven provinces, representing more than 80% of Canada's population, opposed it, as it interferes with provincial jurisdiction over labour relations.

Even well-respected Conservatives such as retired Senator Hugh Segal said it was “badly drafted legislation, flawed, unconstitutional and technically incompetent”.

Both the current and previous Privacy Commissioners said that the bill was a serious breach of privacy in their testimony at the House and at Senate committees. Past privacy commissioner, Jennifer Stoddart, said quite clearly that Bill C-377 was a “a serious breach of privacy.”

The current Privacy Commissioner, Daniel Therrien, said more bluntly that he thought the bill goes too far. In his words, a balance should be struck between transparency, which is an important value, and privacy, which is a value that is also just as important, something Bill C-377 failed to do.

To prove how unfair and unbalanced this bill is, let me share a short story. In 2012, I wrote to the Canada Revenue Agency and asked if they could provide the same information on its employees that Bill C-377 was asking of labour organizations. Its response was that it could not provide the information. The information I received from CRA is that the Privacy Act precludes the CRA from disclosing personal information about its employees. Therefore, CRA, the agency that was set to enforce this law, could not comply with exactly what was being asked of organized labour, of unions, though the passage of Bill C-377.

●(1255)

The second piece of legislation that Bill C-4 will repeal is Bill C-525, the Employees' Voting Rights Act. Like Bill C-377, there was never any evidence provided in support of its need. It was simply another solution in search of a problem. Politically motivated and ideologically based, its sole goal was to make it harder for unions to certify and easier for unions to decertify.

The sponsor of the bill, the member for Red Deer—Lacombe, claimed that the bill was needed because of the “mountain of

complaints” regarding union coercion of workers during union certification campaigns.

He said the following in *Hansard*:

When we hear one person complain about the actions of union organizers, that can be dismissed as a one-off situation. However when we see the mountain of complaints that end up at the labour relations board, it is concerning to me.

That is a serious claim.

Many members might be surprised that when the chair of the Canada Industrial Relations Board appeared before committee during study of the bill, she said that out of 4,000 decisions rendered by the CIRB in the previous 10 years, there were only two complaints of unfair labour practices by unions. That is quite a mountain. She said there were actually more founded unfair labour practice complaints against employers rather than unions.

Bill C-525 made a significant change to the fundamental rights of workers in how they organize themselves, without evidence for its need, bypassing the established consultative process that is critical to maintaining balance in labour relations. Does anyone believe that this is a responsible and fair way for government to make laws that affect the fundamental rights of Canadians?

The previous government was intent on injecting political ideology into labour relations, to a degree that has never been witnessed before at the federal level. I believe both employers and labour would agree that this does nothing to promote harmonious labour relations and is not in the best interests of the economy or our society. Governments must always seek a balance in how they govern, and perhaps no greater place is this required than in labour relations.

The stakeholders in the federal labour sector long ago developed a proven consultative process to amend federal labour legislation. Past Liberal and Progressive Conservative governments supported such a process because it provided legislative stabilities for all stakeholders, and it worked. As a result, there existed a delicate balance that served fairly the interests of employers, unions, workers, and the Canadian economy.

Both Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 politicized that process and undermined the balance in our labour relations system. They were short-sighted labour reforms made without a legitimate consultative process, driven by ideology rather than evidence.

That is why our government is repealing Bills C-377 and C-525. We are committed to the tripartite consultative process, and it is our hope that Bill C-4 will help to re-establish what Andrew Sims said was so important to our modern labour relations regime, and that is balance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech by the member for Cape Breton—Canso, whom I salute.

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I would like to point out that, unlike three of his colleagues this morning, he did not mention the backroom or back-door bill issue.

[English]

The two bills which were introduced in past legislation were identified this morning by three Liberal members as “back-door bills”.

I am sorry, but everybody here entered by the front door, not by the back door.

• (1300)

[Translation]

Like 151 of his colleagues, the member is not in the cabinet. Does that mean that the government and the 151 members will not introduce bills, because they would be back-door bills?

[English]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comment and the question.

To suggest that we as a party do not believe in private members' bills would be very dishonest. However, to pretend that these bills were private members' bills is wrong. The members who presented them were like the Milli Vanilli of legislators. They lip-synched the bills.

Check the lobby registry. See how many times the Merit contractors were in and out of the Prime Minister's Office. The PMO's fingerprints were all over both pieces of legislation. To even disguise them as private members' bills is a disservice to private members' legislation.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is as passionate speaker and a defender of rights. I am glad that this side of the House looks at labour, labour unions, and generally employees as people to be protected. We have had so many incidents of employees losing their protection, whether it was through bankruptcy, moving, contractual labour, or contracting labour out.

I would like the member's opinion on why the previous government was so hell-bent on making such an unpleasant environment for the labour unions, and employees in general.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, I think it is unfair to ask me to look inside the mind of the past government to figure out why the Conservatives wanted to do what they did.

However, it is great to have my colleague back in the House, and she has summed it up. There has been no government in this country that has had organized labour in its crosshairs like the past Conservative government.

We have seen record use of back-to-work legislation. We have seen changes to labour legislation, with the labour laws of this country being changed within 400-page omnibus bills. We saw the change to the definition of “danger” being slid into an omnibus bill. Practices that have long served this country, such as a tripartite consultative consensus-building process, which is to the benefit of Canadian workers, were run over roughshod, and these two pieces of legislation are just two examples.

We saw an obvious attack on organized labour over the tenure of the last government. Why? I do not know if it was part of that divide and conquer, with one group against another in the bigger scheme of things. However, obviously it was one that did not work out well for that Conservative government.

[Translation]

Mr. Rémi Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is determined to restore fair and responsible labour policies in Canada because unions and employers play an important role in protecting the rights of Canadian workers. They help make the middle class more accessible and help it to grow.

We need to work with labour organizations, not against them. That is why we have kept our promise and that is why I invite every member of the House to support this important bill.

We introduced Bill C-4, which repeals the legislative changes made under Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. That is an excellent decision.

Unions and labour organizations have expressed strong opposition to these two laws since they were introduced in Parliament. In spite of everything, obviously, some people may oppose Bill C-4. We are prepared to listen to the concerns of all of the parties involved.

However, I would like to be proactive and explain to the members here today that, despite what some may think, Bill C-4 will be good for labour relations across Canada. Certain supporters of Bill C-377 indicated that it was necessary to improve union financial transparency. They also said that it was necessary to ensure public access to information on union spending, given the favourable treatment that unions receive under taxation law.

However, these arguments do not hold water. Section 110 of the Canada Labour Code already requires unions to provide financial statements to their members free of charge upon request. What is more, provincial labour statutes include similar requirements. Also, the onerous disclosure requirements apply only to labour organizations and labour trusts. They do not apply to other groups that also benefit from special tax breaks under the Income Tax Act. This practice discriminates against unions.

I realize that some provinces have raised questions about repealing Bill C-377. British Columbia's finance minister wrote to the Senate to express his support for this bill. He said there was merit in increasing union transparency, since unions receive tax advantages. However, as I said, these onerous disclosure requirements discriminate against unions, and British Columbia's opinion is not shared by the majority.

Seven provinces came out against Bill C-377, claiming that it encroached on their jurisdictions. These provinces are Quebec, New Brunswick, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia.

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As for Bill C-525, employers and other stakeholders who support union certification by secret ballot could be displeased. They do not need to worry, though, since the previous card check system for sectors under federal jurisdiction was successful for many years. This system is still used in many provinces.

As for Federally Regulated Employers, Transportation and Communications, some non-unionized members could have a problem with the repeal of Bill C-525. They could be concerned that this bill is being repealed but stakeholders have not been consulted.

I want to reassure them. We are doing this because we want to listen to all of the stakeholders. By repealing the legislative changes made by Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, we will simply go back to the way things were so that we can start over again. We will do more than our predecessors and ensure that all stakeholders are properly consulted before any changes are made to federal laws and policies.

We aim to restore a climate of co-operation and develop evidence-based policies. All parties must participate in a constructive manner.

• (1305)

We will use genuine consultations as the basis for developing labour policies that will make Canadian workers and employers more prosperous and improve the economy overall. Those are just some of the ways that Bill C-4 will be good for labour relations and, as a result, our economy.

It is clear that repealing the changes made by Bills C-377 and C-525 is the sensible thing to do. We are listening and acting respectfully. Our government made a commitment to enhancing Canadians' economic and social security, and that is what we are doing.

In my riding, Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, employers, unionized workers and unions have joined forces to defend our region's interests.

In a remote region such as ours, it can be hard for workers and people in general to make their voices heard. Mainstream media do not often talk about what is going on in our regions, but we are coping with major issues too. I would like to share a personal and professional experience. In the fall of 2014, when my region was contending with major cuts in several sectors of our economy, we got word that Quebec CEGEPs were slated for yet another round of cuts. At the time, I was the executive director of the CEGEP de Matane. Management and employees alike felt powerless to do anything about all of the budget cuts, which were going to result in job losses, raise the unemployment rate, which was already three times higher than the Canadian average, and exacerbate a very difficult economic situation. Rather than endure the cuts alone, I decided to get all of the CEGEP employees and their union representatives together, and I put an unusual idea to them. I suggested holding a two-day retreat to discuss the repercussions of the cuts in the region with relevant experts and donating the equivalent of two days' salary to the CEGEP de Matane foundation. In return, I promised not to cut a single job. The goal was to mitigate the cuts and clearly demonstrate our commitment to our community, our workers, and our CEGEP.

In an unprecedented expression of solidarity, all the employees, their union representatives, their union, and the entire student population supported this initiative. We had two days dedicated to reflection, and we all contributed two days' salary to the CEGEP de Matane foundation. We mobilized a number of local socio-economic stakeholders who joined forces to defend the interests of our workers and our region.

Division never serves the community. It is time to come together and develop a relationship of trust with our workers. Together, we can create real, positive change.

• (1310)

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his presentation. People in my riding are also thinking about the repercussions of employees' working conditions. On January 29, 2016, a group called SOS Pauvreté presented a brief on this issue.

According to the brief, having a job does not guarantee that one will not experience poverty. Introducing bills on working conditions is great, but in the context of the labour policy reforms promised by the Liberals, is the government prepared to commit to restoring a fair federal minimum wage, in order to ensure that, in all regions, working is never synonymous with poverty?

Mr. Rémi Massé: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot for her question. The economic well-being of our regions is a concern for our government.

As I said earlier, the economic situation in our regions is very difficult, and the unemployment rate is very high. By working together to make the investments in our regions that we promised during the campaign and by investing in infrastructure, we will create good, well-paying jobs in order to support our families. In recent weeks we have made various commitments and announcements with respect to fostering the development of our regional economies. I am very proud to be involved in this type of initiative.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member a question about secret ballots. All of us in the House were elected by secret ballot. As a matter of principle, I think we understand why secret ballots are important, because they allow people to exercise their political choices free from fear of intimidation or pressure. Therefore, as they wish, people can either be public or private about their political opinions. If we accept that principle for the people who choose their representatives in the House, then why would the hon. member not support ensuring that we have secret ballots in union elections as well?

[Translation]

Mr. Rémi Massé: Mr. Speaker, my opposition colleague knows that the card check system ensures automatic accreditation without a vote.

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The union can also prove that it received a signed membership card from a majority of the unit members or employees. It is important to know that this does not eliminate the possibility of having a secret ballot. There is provision for this type of mechanism, and it can exist under the current process.

•(1315)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the words of wisdom from my colleague.

I would ask him to provide some comment on the importance of working with labour and management, and whether the best way to have a productive workforce is to work co-operatively.

When the bills were brought in as private members' bills, there was a great deal of concern that they had absolutely no government connection, and that there were no discussions or consultations. That is one of the reasons we have to rectify the wrong that the previous government did when bringing the legislation in a couple of years back.

Could the member speak to the importance of consultations and working with labour and management, as well as how it would benefit Canadians to do so?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rémi Massé: Mr. Speaker, my colleague asked an excellent question.

I was a unionized employee of the federal government and various organizations for many years. In recent years, I worked with union associations and union representatives. The key to developing an organization, no matter what kind, is to work together with the union representatives, the unions, management and employers in order to develop excellent collaboration that will advance our files and our organizations. Attempting to sow division will not help advance files and initiatives and develop our economy. By having employers, union members, and unions work together, we can build our country in a constructive manner and develop our economy.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like my Conservative colleagues, I rise in the House today to voice my opposition to Bill C-4, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act.

The point of my speech is quite simple: I want to show Canadians and all the hard workers in my riding that the Liberal government's measures are not in the public's interest.

The Liberal government is working instead for special interest groups of which union bosses are members. Just two weeks ago, we learned that union leaders and the Liberal team made arrangements during the last election campaign. Today, in reading Bill C-4, I can see that the Liberals and union leaders are working hand in hand without any regard for the interests of workers or the general public. I must deplore this in the strongest possible terms.

First, by passing Bill C-4, the Liberal government will abolish two flagship pieces of legislation that the Conservatives put in place to protect workers and ensure union transparency. Bill C-377 provided

for increased accountability on the part of union leaders by requiring unions to disclose any expenditures over \$5,000 and any salaries over \$100,000.

Bill C-525 required that a secret ballot vote be held to set up or do away with company unions. These provisions would have put an end to the intimidation that too often occurs during the union certification or decertification process. When employees were called upon to vote for or against the unionization of their workplace, this bill would have allowed them to do so in an informed manner via secret ballot, as is already the case in the provincial legislatures of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Nova Scotia.

Why do the Liberals want to do away with those provisions? Is it not legitimate for the unionization process to be transparent? Simply put, what seems to be common sense for Canadians is not for the Liberals. The fact of the matter is that it only took them a few weeks to forget their promise to be a transparent government.

Second, the Conservatives were not simply advocating for union transparency because it is a fundamental value. We were also advocating for it on economic principle. Every year, deductible union dues cost the federal government and Canadians some \$500 million. A responsible government has a legitimate reason to demand accountability for these tax advantages.

A number of other countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, and even France, have long required labour organizations to disclose their financial statements.

Third, because I have a very hard time understanding the government's position on transparency, I wondered whether my Conservative colleagues and I are the only ones who are concerned about these issues. The answer is no. I was pleased to come across a Leger survey from 2013, which indicated that 83% of 1,400 respondents said that they supported a bill like the one the Conservatives passed.

More interestingly, 84% of workers who contribute to a union said that they wanted such a bill to be passed, which is similar to the percentage of Canadians who wanted such a bill to be passed. These percentages therefore confirm the public's position on this issue.

During the proceedings of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, there were many different kinds of groups that supported the Conservative bill.

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Among them were the Canadian Taxpayers Federation; the Canadian Federation of Independent Business; LabourWatch; the Conseil du patronat du Québec; Merit Canada; the Montreal Economic Institute; the Independent Contractors and Business Association of British Columbia; the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec; Professor Ian Lee of Carleton University; Douglas J. Forer, a partner with McLennan Ross; Moin Yahya, an associate professor with the University of Alberta faculty of law; Francis Donovan, a butcher at Safeway Canada; Marc Roumy, an Air Canada flight attendant; Brian Johnston, a partner with Stewart McKelvey; the hon. Michel Bastarache, a former Supreme Court justice; and Ken Pereira, a union worker and union leader, just to name a few.

• (1320)

That being said, I want to assure my colleagues across the aisle that the Liberals are not the only ones who hold consultations. The Conservatives also held some, which revealed that our provisions in support of union transparency were welcome and desired.

Fourth, it is one thing for the Liberal government to ignore the surveys and the people consulted, whom I mentioned, and to believe that its position is what is best for Canadians. However, another moral principle comes to mind when I look closely at that position, and that is the principle of political independence.

In order to ensure that the government remains impartial and able to make decisions in the public interest and free from outside influences, I think it should avoid associating with lobby groups that have an interest in the business of government. That is certainly not what we are seeing at this time.

Here is how I see it. First, this is a bad law for democracy, transparency, and accountability. Second, it is pretty clear that the purpose of this law is to thank union leaders for their support in the latest election campaign. Third, the Liberal government's very first piece of legislation will take away workers' power just to make union bosses happy. Fourth, this law will not protect workers. It will open the door to workplace bullying because employees will have to state their position on unionization publicly rather than secretly. Fifth, transparency is a fundamental principle, and by overturning the old law, the Liberals are flouting this principle. Sixth, even though the law did not regulate union activities or how unions could use their money, it did provide for accountability. Seventh, unions are the only private organizations that have access to funds that people are required to pay, which is like the power to tax. Mandatory contributions, unlike voluntary contributions, should entail a moral obligation to demonstrate transparency. Eighth, since unions are already required to open their books to their members, it should not cost them much more to open their books to everyone. Ninth, union dues should not be used for purposes not approved by union members.

I did not get into politics to criticize excessively everything the government opposite does. I believe we must work together in the House to make the best possible decisions in the public interest.

That being said, I want to use this last part of my speech to share with the government the way I see things with regard to unionization, which, in my view, represents how a very large segment of the public feels about this as well.

What is more, since the Liberal government keeps saying that it wants to consult various stakeholders and different people and listen to their points of view before making decisions, then I would hope that my thoughts here will be taken into consideration.

First, as the member for Richmond—Arthabaska, the former mayor of Victoriaville, and a former school principal, I have worked and negotiated with a number of union groups on many occasions. These negotiations were always carried out respectfully, and for that reason, my perception of unions and unionized employees is anything but negative.

On the contrary, I believe it is entirely appropriate for a group of individuals with common interests to ask someone to negotiate on their behalf. Essentially, the union's mission is to improve its members' working conditions, and that mission is absolutely valid and legitimate.

However, the comment made by the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour that unions play a critical role in ensuring that workers receive decent wages and are treated fairly in safe, healthy work environments seems to suggest that the law passed by the previous government undermines the unionization principle and workers' rights, and that is completely untrue.

The minister should also know that just because employees are not unionized does not mean that their rights will not be respected. I am fortunate that my riding is home to Cascades, a family company that has been in Kingsey Falls since 1964 and still employs nearly 11,000 workers in North America and Europe.

• (1325)

Thanks to the management philosophy of the Lemaire brothers, employees of many of the company's operating units voluntarily chose not to unionize because they know that they are afforded favourable working conditions. This company shows that it is not necessary for employees to be unionized to have excellent working conditions. I would like to take this opportunity to commend Cascades and all of the companies across the country that take care of their employees.

Finally, the bill is a direct attack on democracy, accountability, and transparency. It does nothing to protect workers or the public.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.):
Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his detailed remarks.

I would like to raise a few points about his speech. Many provinces, particularly Nova Scotia, clearly indicated that Bill C-377 was a duplication of existing measures. The extra requirements were therefore unnecessary.

It is also important to point out that seven of the 10 provinces were against Bill C-377. They clearly explained and showed that these measures already existed.

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Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for his question.

Just because the provinces are against certain initiatives does not mean that the government cannot move forward. This matter also falls under federal jurisdiction. In this case, I note that the Conservatives' actions during their last term of office did not in any way jeopardize unions or their fundamental purpose. It simply ensured that the Canadian people and Canadian workers would be respected and that union dues would be used to improve working conditions through negotiations with management.

[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on an excellent speech, especially how he had his facts straight.

The Liberal government likes to pretend that it is fact- and evidence-based in everything it does. We heard today that in multiple polls, more than 83% of union workers were in favour of Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. Another fact is that without Bill C-377, there would be no financial transparency to the taxpayer for the half a billion dollars in tax credits from union dues.

I am interested in my colleague's opinion. Does he think that Bill C-4 is a fact- and evidence-based approach?

• (1330)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

I completely agree with her. I searched through all the documentation I had and did not find any justification for changing the law. The bill does not in any way attack Canadian unions and workers. The sole objective of the bill was to ensure that union leaders were accountable for the use of monies paid by Canadian workers. I am still trying to determine the objective of the amending legislation.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will help my colleague out with his research.

In a letter sent to the Conservatives, the Canadian Bar Association said that the Conservatives' bill violated privacy and constitutional rights. Even the Christian Labour Association of Canada called on the government to withdraw the bill and draft a new version because the bill violated privacy laws and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. There were some who said that this was not a good bill.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I want to be clear that I never suggested that everyone agreed on this bill. That is the beauty of democracy. There are some who are in favour and others who are against.

My point was that the government claimed that there was no consultation and that the public was completely against the bill, which is entirely untrue. In a survey, 83% of the general public and 84% of unionized workers who pay dues supported the Conservatives' bill.

The government was elected with 42% of the vote, and it thinks it has the authority to change this law. Since 83% or 84% of the public agrees with the bill, I have to wonder about the legitimacy of this decision.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak to the bill and talk about the restoration of a fair and balanced relationship that needs to exist in a regulatory framework for unions to ensure that workers are provided with adequate protection, and that we acknowledge that the disclosures already in place provide many of the things that the hon. members opposite talked about.

The reality is that the Canada Labour Code already provides for such disclosure, and that under Bill C-377 we are seeing a lot more red tape and are placing unions in a precarious situation of being very disadvantaged through in collective bargaining process. We can see its negatives, but we have not seen any of the positives.

It is no coincidence that the changes in Bill C-4 have been brought forward so early, as they are a recognition of this government's commitment to restoring that balance and fairness that the Prime Minister promised in the last election campaign. I would remind members that the Prime Minister had the opportunity to speak at length about the importance of restoring that balance and it became a very important plank in the last election. Certainly we heard it reiterated in the mandate letter given to the minister.

While I have a great many concerns about Bill C-377 that was adopted in the previous Parliament and which this bill would repeal, I want to focus the preponderance of my comments today on Bill C-525 and the legislative amendments proposed in that bill. Bill C-525 changed union certification and decertification processes under three federal labour relations statutes: the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, and the Public Service Labour Relations Act.

Prior to the amendments being enacted through Bill C-525, federally regulated unions could use what was called a card check system for certification. If a union demonstrated that a majority of workers had signed union cards, the union could be certified as the bargaining agent for those workers. A vote was only required if less than a majority signed, but enough to indicate a strong interest, for example, 35% under the Canada Labour Code.

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Bill C-525 changed that to require that unions show at least 40% membership support before being able to hold a secret vote, and required a vote even when more than 50% of workers had signed union membership cards. It made it easier for unions to be decertified by lowering the threshold to trigger a decertification vote to 40%, compared to the majority support that was previously required. Essentially, Bill C-525 makes it more difficult for Canadian workers to unionize. That is not good for our economy, nor is it good for Canadians.

Unions help address inequality by helping to ensure there are fair wages. They help protect workers' safety and prevent discrimination in the workplace. They also help employers because a fair workplace is a more productive workplace, and a more productive workplace helps to grow our economy and strengthen our middle class.

What Bill C-525 presented was essentially a solution in search of a problem. There were no great rallies on Parliament Hill or even in any boardrooms demanding that we change a union certification system that had worked successfully for many, many years. The card check system, whereby a union is certified by demonstrating majority support for signed union cards, has been used successfully for many years in the federal jurisdiction and in several provinces. A number of unions like Unifor and the Air Line Pilots Association argued that it is fast and efficient and much more likely to be free of employer interference than the mandatory secret ballot system brought in under Bill C-525, which we seek to repeal.

The card check system is not undemocratic. It requires majority support through signed cards, and the Canadian Industrial Relations Board has strong measures in place to ensure that this process is fair. It should also be noted that representatives from both sides of the bargaining table were highly critical of how the previous government brought in these changes. Both bills were brought in as private members' bills without consultation with either employers, unions, or other levels of government. Many argued that it set a very dangerous precedent for the future of labour reform. They are right. That precedent must be expunged. We believe that fair and balanced labour policies developed through real and meaningful consultations with unions, employers, stakeholders, the provinces and territories, and the Canadian public are essential for harmonious labour relations.

● (1335)

Bill C-377 also presents problems that could be averted with proper consultation. Members have heard my colleagues talk about this in great detail, and I alluded to it earlier in my comments.

Among other things, it has the potential to seriously disrupt the collective bargaining process. For example, detailed information about unions, including information on union strike funds, will be available to employers. It seems to me like a blatant attempt to make things harder for unions.

It is essential that we have a system that is both fair and balanced, that the regulations we have in place ensure there is proper disclosure and rules in our labour negotiation process, but that we allow unions to be strong to protect the rights of workers, to ensure that our economy can grow and be productive, and that employers are treated fairly.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have not had the opportunity to intervene yet with the member. I would like to congratulate him on his election. Obviously I have a different opinion that I have given in this place.

We elect our Speaker in the House by secret ballot. In fact, our constituents elect us as members of Parliament by secret ballot. Why is the government putting forward a bill that would take away the right to a secret ballot by union members? We have seen how it benefits us in this place and in the country in the democratic process. Why would the government take away that right?

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, I addressed that in my comments. We had a system and a regime that worked very effectively. There was no one clamouring for the changes that were made. They were made in a way that was incredibly detrimental to the labour movement as a whole.

Having a fair and balanced approach is absolutely essential to the success of our labour market going forward. If we tinker with a system by bringing in the types of changes that are punitive, that create red tape, and that are ineffective, all we do is create more tension between unions and employers and, in fact, undermine the essential role that unions have to play. It is very clear that these changes are required to get us back to the state we were in previously.

● (1340)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is great to see my friend and colleague back in the chamber, speaking so passionately and well-informed about this and many other topics.

He took a bit of a hiatus from the chamber. I have a question about some of the testimony that was presented both in the House hearings and in the Senate hearings and about part of a study that was undertaken?

The province of British Columbia has flip-flopped back and forth between card check and secret ballot a number of times. For the past 18 years, it has studied the impact of the card check over the secret ballot. Ms. Sara Slinn, associate professor from Osgoode Hall law school, has been researching this for a number of years. She said that it was intimidation on the part of the employer that skewed the vote in favour of the employer, of non-certification, in the case of the secret ballot. I will read into the record her comments. She said:

In sum, the research evidence shows that there is no support for the notion that votes are necessarily a superior mechanism to cards for determining union representation. Nor does it support the notion that union intimidation or pressure is a substantial phenomenon in certification. What it does demonstrate is that employer interference and, more so, employee fear of employer interference, is a real phenomenon. It's effective, and it's more effective under votes than card-based mechanisms.

Is my colleague familiar with the research done by Ms. Slinn?

Mr. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, I was maybe making the point at too high a level, but the points made by the parliamentary secretary are very pertinent to the argument.

Government Orders

The problem I have with the assertion that was made by the member opposite in his question was that it cloaked a lot of misinformation in shadows of the truth. We had an incredibly effective system that was working, that nobody was asking to have changed, and the previous government brought forward changes that were incredibly disruptive to labour relations and put unions at a great disadvantage and potentially greatly harmed the collective bargaining process.

Members can obfuscate and try to create these false arguments around principles that do not exist around being more democratic, but it is not true. We have to get down to the core fact. We had a system that worked and was effective for both sides and we need to return to that.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is certainly not often that we, in the House of Commons, are called upon to repeal legislation passed by the previous government. However, in this case it is absolutely necessary, and I encourage all members of the House to support Bill C-4.

The reason is very clear. Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 upset the balance in labour relations in Canada, giving employers a distinct advantage over unions. It is unfair, unbalanced and un-Canadian.

For example, let us take a look at how Bill C-377 impacts the collective bargaining process. On one side, we have union representatives trying to negotiate a wage increase, better working conditions or more flexible work hours and so on. On the other side, we have the employer who wants to operate as efficiently as possible in order to maximize profits.

If there is a deadlock in the bargaining, each party has their own tools to break the deadlock. Employers can lock out employees. Similarly, unions can go on strike. It is very clear that they are seen at the collective bargaining table in a truthful manner to resolve the matter.

Bill C-377 amended the Income Tax Act to require labour organizations and labour trusts, including unions, to file detailed financial and other information returns with the Canada Revenue Agency.

That information, such as details on their assets, their liabilities, their salaries and so on is then to be made public on the CRA's website. This means that unions must reveal how much money they have in their strike fund for a possible work stoppage. That means employers can find out how long a union could stay out if it came to a strike.

Under Bill C-377, the collective bargaining system is no longer a level playing field. It gives the employers' side a distinct advantage. By knowing that the union has only a certain amount of funds for a strike or lock-out, they know exactly how far the union can be pushed to accept less in order to avoid either of those eventualities. Does anybody really think that is fair? I do not think it is, and neither does our government.

Let us remember that collective bargaining went well for decades under the previous system.

Bill C-377 also contains other provisions that are equally unacceptable. For example, unions, but not employers, have to

report salaries paid to their officers and directors. Unions, but not employers, have to report time spent by some personnel on political lobbying and non-union related activities.

● (1345)

In addition, the bill duplicates existing requirements under the Canada Labour Code that requires the unions to provide their members with reports on their financials, free of charge and on demand. Similar requirements are also already in place under many provincial labour laws.

The second bill to be repealed, Bill C-525, has been described by my colleague, the member for Cape Breton—Canso, as a solution looking for a problem. That is a very apt description.

First, what the bill changes is the way unions can become certified or decertified. Previously, unions getting themselves certified was not a big problem. Even if 35% of employees signed cards, they had to present this to the Canada Industrial Relations Board to be registered as the bargaining agent.

Unfortunately, we have seen examples of employers that will resort to any measure to deter their employees from unionizing.

What Bill C-525 does in effect is allow employers to know exactly when a union might be trying to organize a workplace union. Even though most employers act ethically to prevent unions from organizing, the point is that employers now have a powerful tool they did not have before to slow down or stop the union certification process.

Prior Bill C-525, when federally regulated private sector workers wanted to organize in a particular workplace, if a majority of the employees signed union cards, they could go to the Canada Industrial Relations Board, show it the cards and the CIRB could certify them as the bargaining agent. This was the system from decades onwards. If less than a majority of employees signed union cards, but at least 35% did, certification could be done.

More generally is the ability to unfairly influence the collective bargaining process.

Canada needs a collective bargaining system, a system that is fair and balanced, a system in which both unions and employers come to the table in good faith to bargain on an equal level.

Repealing the changes made by these two bills would help correct the current imbalance. I hope all my colleagues in the House will give this measure their support.

● (1350)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. Naturally, we are very pleased to hear that the government will repeal these two ill-conceived laws brought in by the previous government.

My colleague spoke about good faith. Indeed, it is very important for workers to be able to bargain in good faith.

Statements by Members

However, although this bill shows some openness towards workers and unions, the Liberals committed to repealing the law regarding sick leave for the public service, but now they are joining the bargaining table with the same agreement and the same negotiator as the Conservatives. Why? This seems like a smokescreen to me. There is no real change in approach.

How does my colleague explain his government's actions?

[English]

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Mr. Speaker, if Bill C-4 is passed, it will restore total fairness and balance to the Canadian labour relations system.

The repealing of Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 is required.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard members across the way say that a secret ballot creates opportunities for intimidation by the employer.

With all due respect, this makes absolutely no sense to me. How can there be intimidation around a secret ballot vote?

I wonder if the hon. member could explain how that works. If intimidation is such a problem in secret ballot elections, why do we do that in virtually every other case where we have elections?

•(1355)

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Mr. Speaker, it is obvious. The unions and employers have equal rights and are sitting at the bargaining table. The decisions made at the bargaining table need to be done by the correct procedures. That is the way we want to bring changes.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if my colleague could provide some comment in terms of how important it is that we have good labour management relationships here in Canada. This is something the Conservative Party, when it was in government, never really recognized. By having good labour management relationships, it is better for our economy and all Canadians benefit from that.

I am wondering if my colleague could provide some comment on just how important it is that we get it right, and how the legislation that we are debating today actually fixes a problem that the former Conservative government created.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Mr. Speaker, people are working in factories, some are in unions and some are independent, without unions.

If somebody wants to form a union or work with a union, they should be free to take part in a union. There should be a free process, a free way of working. There should be a process to bring issues to the bargaining table. That is the best way to do it.

That is why we want to get these bills rescinded, and to move forward on Bill C-4.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have heard various Liberal members say that taking a secret ballot away will somehow make the labour movement stronger.

I would simply point out that seven provinces actually utilize the secret ballot in certifying or decertifying a union. Is this member

saying that those seven provinces are wrong in how they deal with labour relations?

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Mr. Speaker, again, repealing Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 is a priority of our mandate. These bills need to be rescinded. Bill C-4 is required to be passed. This will put collective bargaining on the table in a better way, and will be a benefit to the employees.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

THE PATRIOTS OF 1837-38

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, February 15, was a day of mourning in Quebec, in commemoration of the hanging of five Patriotes: François-Marie-Thomas Chevalier de Lorimier, Charles Hindelang, Pierre-Rémi Narbonne, Amable Daunais, and François Nicolas. The Patriotes of 1837-38 stood for justice and democracy and were republicans who refuted the monarchy's authority.

The fight for freedom took place across the world. The Patriotes did not hesitate to jump into an unequal fight, in the name of a good and noble cause, and the people of Quebec are still beholden to them.

To the men and women who gave their lives for our freedom, I say thank you. We will never forget.

To quote Chevalier de Lorimier's last words before he was hanged, "Long live freedom! Long live independence!"

* * *

[English]

SYNERGY AWARD

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart (Fundy Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome many pre-eminent Canadians to Ottawa today to receive prestigious prizes from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council. Their work has kept Canada in the forefront of discovery and innovation. I am honoured to announce that one of those researchers is a resident of the riding of Fundy Royal, which I proudly represent.

Mr. Greg Adams is a researcher with J.D. Irving, Limited. His work with J. David Miller of Carleton University has been awarded this year's Synergy award for research focused on finding an environmentally sensitive way to combat the negative impact of spruce budworm to the forestry and paper industries. Their discovery of an insect toxic strain of natural fungi has now been replicated in greenhouses and allowed J.D. Irving, Limited to mass-produce more than 100 million endophyte-enhancing seedlings. The resulting trees have demonstrated an increased tolerance to spruce budworm.

I would like to invite all members of the House to join me in a round of applause to recognize the important contributions to science and industry of these great researchers.

Statements by Members

●(1400)

RARE DISEASE DAY

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, later this month, on February 29, we will mark Rare Disease Day. The day raises awareness of the estimated 2.7 million Canadians directly affected by over 6,000 rare diseases and disorders. That is roughly one in 12 persons. Of these diseases, 75% affect children, and 30% of those affected will die before their fifth birthday.

Speaking on behalf of a family affected by a rare disease called Alport syndrome, a rare genetic condition that leads to loss of hearing and kidney failure, I have seen first-hand the impact a rare disease can have on a family. I know the helplessness and the financial hardship parents can feel when facing an incurable condition that is affecting their child.

I want to thank the medical professionals and researchers who assist those affected by rare diseases and disorders every day.

On February 29, I invite all members to join me in joining the parents and families affected by rare diseases and having their voices heard.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Darshan Singh Kang (Calgary Skyview, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been an Albertan for over 45 years. I have experienced the boom and bust cycle of the Alberta economy. I lived through the 1981 recession. My family and I lost everything. It took over two decades to rebuild. No family should have to go through these circumstances again, yet here we are with over 100,000 job losses.

Our Prime Minister and the Minister of Natural Resources know very well that Alberta energy resources are essential to our nation's economic prosperity. That is why they recently visited Alberta to consult with the provincial leaders and the energy sector. As we do not control the price of oil internationally, we know it is important to get our resources to tidewater.

I stand with my Alberta colleagues as a champion to get our resources to tidewater. However, we need to be responsible for our actions. I cannot agree to do the same things that did not benefit our resource sector for the past 10 years. Our government is committed to doing things differently to ensure prosperity for all Canadians.

* * *

SHOOTING AT LA LOCHE

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when I first stood in this House and spoke about my community, I never could have imagined that the next time I would say the name of La Loche here would be in the wake of the painful events of January 22, 2016. As we learn more about what happened and the acts of heroism and courage by the people in my school, I am thankful to the local fire department, the RCMP, and the other first responders. On behalf of La Loche and northern Saskatchewan, I want to thank all Canadians who sent their thoughts and prayers to La Loche and the Clearwater River Dene Nation. I am thankful for the comfort they have given us, for the strength they

have given us, and for the hope they have given us. With the help of the government and the support of all Canadians, together we can rebuild La Loche and the Clearwater River Dene Nation.

Mahsi cho.

* * *

E.W.R. STEACIE MEMORIAL FELLOWSHIP AWARD

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the presence in the House of many pre-eminent Canadians who are this year's recipients of Canada's top researcher awards.

It is my honour to recognize a Vancouver Quadra constituent, Dr. Curtis Berlinguette from the University of British Columbia, who is receiving the E.W.R. Steacie Memorial Fellowship award. Curtis' work truly represents the next generation of discoverers and innovators. He is working at the nanoscale to design new materials for next-generation solar cells that turn sunlight into electricity efficiently and cost-effectively. This kind of innovation is exactly what our country needs to power the transition to a clean energy economy and help meet Canada's climate and economic goals.

I invite all members of the House to join me in a round of applause to recognize Dr. Berlinguette's important contributions and those of all the award winners.

* * *

●(1405)

CALGARY FOREST LAWN

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week I attended numerous functions recognizing the contributions made by volunteers. These volunteers donate their time for the benefit of their fellow citizens, from mosques, churches, temples, and clubs to community associations to name a few organizations that enhance the quality of life in our community.

Today I wish to recognize the community associations of my riding of Calgary Forest Lawn: Southview, Abbeydale, Albert Park and Radisson Heights, Applewood Park, Crossroads-Mayland Heights-Vista Heights, Forest Heights, Forest Lawn, Marlborough Park, Marlborough, Penbrooke Meadows, Pineridge, Coral Springs, Monterey Park, Rundle, and Park Ridge Estates.

To all volunteers we say our heartfelt thanks.

* * *

FORMER MAYOR OF MISSISSAUGA

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past Sunday, Valentine's Day, I had the opportunity to pay tribute to a great friend and public servant, someone who many in the House have known for over four decades, "Hurricane" Hazel McCallion, who turned a remarkable 95 years young on Valentine's Day.

As the longest-serving mayor of Mississauga, Hazel built the city to become the sixth largest in Canada.

Born on the Gaspé coast, she has a remarkable energy and spirit that has taken on recessions and depressions, hurricanes and train derailments, from the ticker tape to a Twitter and YouTube sensation. She is a member of the Order of Canada, a pioneer for women. She is a model of our resilient Canadian spirit.

I wish a happy birthday to Hazel.

* * *

NOVA SCOTIA HERITAGE DAY

Mr. Colin Fraser (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked the second annual Nova Scotia Heritage Day. Heritage Day is an annual reminder of our province's past and an opportunity to honour the remarkable people, places, and events that have contributed to our unique heritage.

The 2016 honouree was Joseph Howe, the self-taught owner of the *Novascotian* newspaper, who laid the foundation for the freedom of the press and who brought responsible government to Nova Scotia in 1848 as premier.

[Translation]

We are proud of our heritage in my riding of West Nova. The cultural diversity in my region plays a huge role in the history of our province and our country.

[English]

On behalf of my hon. colleagues, I want to congratulate Nova Scotians on observing Heritage Day 2016. In the years ahead I look forward to celebrating many other contributions that have enriched our province and make it such a great place to live.

* * *

GLOBAL TB SUMMIT

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last December, I was fortunate to take part in the second Global TB Summit in Cape Town, South Africa. This summit brought together 45 members of Parliament, senators, and representatives from over 30 countries, all dedicated to creating the political will to end tuberculosis in our lifetime. I saw first-hand the incredible work and services being delivered by the passionate health care providers.

Here in Canada, we often forget that TB is still a problem while new, drug-resistant strains have emerged. NGOs, like the Global Fund, rightly remind us of this reality as they fight to end TB around the world. As a strong partner, Canada should continue to provide the necessary resources to the Global Fund as it enters its new funding cycle.

I encourage the Government of Canada to continue its support for excellent NGOs like the Global Fund and to give our fair share to end TB once and for all.

* * *

LOUIS RIEL

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was a great day yesterday, not just because we spent time

Statements by Members

with family but because we honoured a great Canadian. In Manitoba, it is known as Louis Riel Day.

He was not just a Métis hero but a patriot who believed in the ideals of justice, love, respect, honesty, courage, humility, knowledge, and effort. He was an example to all Canadians, leading a province into Confederation even upon pain of death and at great personal sacrifice.

He believed in a society where, no matter one's creed, colour, culture, or religion, we all have a rightful place in this world.

With modern human values, he is a true Canadian hero. In his time, he was a traitor, but he is no longer. *Hai hai.*

* * *

● (1410)

[Translation]

NATIONAL FLAG OF CANADA DAY

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was the 51st anniversary of Canada's national flag.

On that day in 1965, our flag was raised on Parliament Hill in Ottawa and in communities all over Canada for the first time.

Today, Canadians know that the maple leaf represents a free, bilingual, democratic, and diverse country, a country that we are proud to call our own. All around the world, it symbolizes openness and optimism. The Canadian flag unites us and represents our values and has done so for the past 51 years.

I encourage Canadians to gather together to celebrate this precious symbol not only on National Flag of Canada Day but throughout the year.

* * *

NATURAL SCIENCES AND ENGINEERING RESEARCH COUNCIL OF CANADA AWARDS

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like my colleagues, I want to acknowledge the presence in Ottawa today of a number of exceptional Canadian researchers, including one from Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, Professor Jean Caron, an expert in precision irrigation.

These researchers are the recipients of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada Awards, which honour excellence in research.

These men and women contribute to making our country a leader in discovery and innovation. They were chosen by their peers to receive these awards, including the Gerhard Herzberg Canada Gold Medal for Science and Engineering, which was awarded to Victoria Kaspi of McGill University, one of the best physicists in the world and the head of the McGill Pulsar Group.

I invite hon. members to congratulate these men and women who make us so proud.

Statements by Members

[English]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Deborah Schulte (King—Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise for the first time in this House to commemorate an important anniversary in Canadian history.

On February 15, 1930, Cairine Wilson was sworn in as Canada's first female senator. The appointment came just four months after judgment in a groundbreaking case in which Canada's Famous Five successfully appealed to the Privy Council of England to include women as persons under the law.

[Translation]

The Famous Five paved the way for future generations of women to engage in the political process.

[English]

Today, we are honoured to have, in Ottawa, Marcia McClung, granddaughter of Famous Five member Nellie McClung, who along with Donna Dasko and Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, will be attending a Famous Five reception this evening.

As a suffragist, activist, reformer, legislator, and author, Nellie McClung long fought for the political rights women now have today, giving women like me an opportunity to serve in this House. We thank her.

* * *

[Translation]

SHOOTING AT LAC-SIMON

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to extend my condolences to the families and loved ones of the victims of the tragic incident that took place last weekend in the Anishinabe community of Lac-Simon in Abitibi.

Twenty-six-year-old police officer Thierry Leroux died Saturday night after a police call went terribly wrong. Such heartbreaking incidents remind us of the risks that our police officers run every day in order to keep Canadians safe.

The people of Quebec are reeling from the shock and stand in solidarity with the people of Lac-Simon, as well as with all northern communities, the police services affected, and the families of the young men who died tragically last Saturday. It has been a very difficult time.

[Member spoke in aboriginal language and provided the following translation:]

The weekend's events are beyond tragic, but we must be strong for one another.

* * *

THIERRY LEROUX

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment in the House today to pay tribute to Thierry Leroux, a young 26-year-old police officer, who died Saturday in Lac-Simon, Abitibi.

Thierry Leroux had just recently finished his studies and was described as a smart young man, a positive leader, cheerful, respectful of others and respected by all. People also said that he loved his job and was a young man who lived life to the fullest. Thierry Leroux made the ultimate sacrifice to protect others.

I know that all members of this House join with me, as the deputy critic for public safety and as a father, in extending sincere condolences to Thierry Leroux's family, colleagues and friends.

* * *

●(1415)

[English]

BOUTROS BOUTROS-GHALI

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we mourn the loss of Egypt's Boutros Boutros-Ghali, former secretary-general of the United Nations.

Mr. Boutros-Ghali's storied legacy includes a vision of lasting peace for the Middle East and his role in the negotiation of the 1979 peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. He also led the UN through some of its greatest challenges, including the crises in Rwanda, Somalia, and the former Yugoslavia.

[Translation]

Furthermore, he authored a unique UN report, "An Agenda for Peace", a document on conflict prevention and the process for achieving and maintaining peace, and other subsequent documents on development and democracy.

After leaving the UN, Mr. Boutros-Ghali was the secretary general of La Francophonie. In 2004 he was named the president of the new human rights council.

[English]

A global thinker, a distinguished diplomat, and a courageous statesman, Mr. Boutros-Ghali was a true champion for world peace.

We extend our deepest condolences to Mr. Boutros-Ghali's family, friends, and former UN colleagues at this most difficult time.

* * *

SHOOTING AT LAC-SIMON

The Speaker: Following discussions among representatives of all parties in the House, I understand there is agreement to observe a moment of silence in reference to the shooting at Lac-Simon in Abitibi, Quebec.

I now invite all hon. members to rise.

[A moment of silence observed.]

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the last year, our fighter jets have brought the fight to ISIS because it is the right thing to do, and it is still right thing to do. Why? It is because ISIS is still enslaving women and children; it is still throwing gays and lesbians off rooftops; it is still murdering anyone who has a different belief system.

The fight against ISIS is a just fight, but the Prime Minister is taking us out of the fight against ISIS.

If he will not fight terrorists, just when will he ever fight?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that this government and the party we represent have always understood that ISIS represents a threat to innocence in the region and to stability and security around the world. That is why Canada has an important role to play.

After we got elected, we spent three months consulting with our allies, talking about the best possible way Canada could help in stabilizing the region, about being there robustly and for the long haul. The comprehensive and strong plan we put forward last week, which highlights the role that Canada can play, is exactly what Canadians expect us to do.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, training and diplomacy and humanitarian efforts are important, but they are not fighting. The Prime Minister thinks the only reason the Royal Canadian Air Force was fighting ISIS terrorists was that, as he said, Canada was whipping out our CF-18s to see how big they were.

He just does not get it. In this world, there are times when military action is necessary and fighting is necessary, but he has taken us out of that fight.

If he will not fight terrorists, just when will he ever fight?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight what Colonel Steve Warren, the spokesman for Operation Inherent Resolve, which is the U.S. version of Operation Impact, said.

He said:

We are not going to bomb our way out of this problem, right? It's never going to happen. So we've got enough bombers...but we can't lose sight of the fact that we have to train this Iraqi security force. This Iraqi army needs to be trained, it's one of our primary lines of effort and as we see nations like the Canadians agree to triple their presence, we find that extraordinarily helpful.

Canada is doing what our allies need us to do.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, training is helpful, but it is not fighting. The Prime Minister has taken us out of the fight against ISIS.

Oral Questions

Hamas, a listed terrorist group, was found using UNRWA schools and hospitals in Gaza to store rockets and weapons designed to kill Israeli citizens, yet the Prime Minister has planned \$15 million in new funding for UNRWA.

Even worse, UNRWA staff have been suspended and fired after inciting anti-Semitic violence.

Why is the Prime Minister restoring funding to an organization that has been linked to Hamas?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was happy to welcome the UN Secretary-General to Ottawa last week to highlight that, in fact, Canada is willing and open to re-engaging with the world in a positive, constructive way because, quite frankly, Canadians expect us to be helpful in the world.

As we look at different ways of engaging, ways of supporting the United Nations in the good work that it does, we will of course look at all the various things that the past government cancelled for political reasons.

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[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government's incompetence and bungling have reached a new low in the fight against the so-called Islamic State. The Minister of International Development and La Francophonie has acknowledged that the money she is sending into the field could end up in the hands of terrorists. The excuse she gave is that Canada does not control how the money is distributed in the field. That is unacceptable and it is not the Canadian way of doing things.

What meaningful and effective measures will the minister take to prevent humanitarian aid money from ending up in the hands of terrorists?

[English]

Ms. Karina Gould (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague well knows, the practice of providing funding for humanitarian assistance is something that continues from the previous government. It is neutral, it is impartial, and we are making sure that the money is going toward civilians who need assistance, as we should do as Canadians in the world.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what a bungled mess. The Liberals are bent on bringing our CF-18 fighters back for ideological reasons, but it turns out that at the same time, we will be sending four Griffon helicopters to fight the so-called Islamic State. This is yet more proof that the Liberals are incompetent and flying by the seat of their pants when it comes to fighting this terrorist group.

Oral Questions

Can the minister confirm that the Griffon helicopters are fit for combat, or is Canada about to send unarmed pilots into a violent combat zone?

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Griffon helicopters are being deployed for the safety of our troops in northern Iraq. They will be used for the transportation of our personnel because they provide increased force protection for our brave men and women in uniform.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the election, Canadians were led to believe that under a Liberal government the mission in Iraq and Syria would be scaled back and that Canada would no longer participate in a combat mission. However, General Vance said that with the Liberals' new mission, the lives of the men and women of the military are actually at greater risk. Then over the weekend, the Minister of National Defence also admitted that this is indeed an expansion with increased risk.

Can the Prime Minister please explain how we can call this a non-combat mission when there is in fact more risk for our troops on the front line?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the beaches of World War II and in the trenches of World War I, Canadians have never shied away from standing up and doing what is right. We are actually—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. Members will come to order please. Let us hear the answer to the question. We are each going to take our turn. The Right Hon. Prime Minister has the floor.

• (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, Canadians have always been willing to step up when the need is there, to have a positive impact in the world, and we will continue to do so. That is why our mission against ISIL, which will involve more robust training and engagement, is an important part of Canada's role. Our troops will always have the capacity to defend themselves when fired upon.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister just gave two examples of combat missions. Which is it? Is it a combat mission, yes or no?

[*Translation*]

The Prime Minister is leaving questions about his new mission in Iraq unanswered. There will be no air strikes, but there will be a refuelling aircraft on site to support air strikes. Our ground troops will identify targets for air strikes. The Prime Minister is tripling the number of people involved in this combat mission, and his Chief of the Defence Staff has admitted that it will be more dangerous.

Why is the Prime Minister beefing up the military mission even though he promised Canadians that he would shrink it?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we kept our promise to pull the CF-18s from the bombing mission even though our pilots were doing very good work. We can do other things that our allies do not do as well, such as training and work on the ground. We have experience in that area that we can

share, experience that our allies very much appreciate in the fight against ISIL.

* * *

[*English*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week I was in Saskatchewan and heard first-hand the impact that growing unemployment and lay-offs are having. Families are struggling and have no cushion to fall back on. Our EI system is so broken that fewer than 4 in 10 unemployed Canadians are actually getting benefits. The government needs to act swiftly to help them. Will the Liberals move immediately to drop the threshold for eligibility to 360 hours and extend the length of benefits? Yes or no.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians well saw during the last election campaign that the Liberal Party campaigned and promised to address the challenges on EI, to make sure that individuals who need the support of employment insurance are going to get it. I certainly heard that more directly in my visits to Saskatchewan and Alberta recently. We are working hard to meet that demand.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how bad does it have to get for him to say yes?

Saskatchewan's farmers want answers also. The Conservative government dismantled the Canadian Wheat Board through Bill C-18.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Let us see if they applaud after this.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Wheat Board Alliance tells us the loss of the single-desk system has meant a whopping \$6.5 billion shortfall for grain farmers in just the past two years. Last week, farmers passed a unanimous resolution calling for the restoration of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Before the election, the Liberals talked a good game on this issue, but now in government are they actually going to help farmers and restore the Canadian Wheat Board? Yes or no.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the commercialization of the Canadian Wheat Board was completed under the previous government. G3 Canada Limited is now a fully independent commercial entity that is operating in the competitive grain-handling business with no ties to government.

*Oral Questions***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has not given Canadians a single good reason why we should stop bombing ISIS with our fighter jets. Matthew Fisher, a senior foreign correspondent, noted that despite diplomatic niceties, the idea that our allies would be happy to see our CF-18s come home is hogwash. General Vance has said that by tripling the number of special operation forces on the ground, it increases the risk. Why is the Prime Minister reducing our capabilities, taking us out of the fight against ISIS, and putting our troops at risk?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is stepping up to the fight. We also know that the defeat of ISIL can only happen on the ground. It cannot be won from the air. Tripling our training capacity and doubling our intelligence is exactly the capability that our coalition needs.

• (1430)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a non-combat mission, so we are not in the fight. The fact is the Prime Minister is putting our troops at increased risk. Just last December, CF-18s protected our troops and allies from a major ISIS attack. Instead of leaving our CF-18s to protect troops and destroy ISIS, the Prime Minister is sending unarmed Griffon helicopters. Why is the Prime Minister endangering members of the Canadian Armed Forces by withdrawing the CF-18s from the fight against ISIS?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the member that I was briefed on the attack. Our brave pilots did participate in that, but other coalition jets also participated in that strike. We are tripling our training capacity, doubling our intelligence, and as the coalition commander said to me while at the Munich Security Conference, our plan is forward looking, and that is exactly what they need.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, UNRWA, was established in 1949 to support Palestinian refugees, but for years UNRWA has been politicized by the corrupt Hamas government in Gaza, in flagrant contradiction of the UN's stated goal of neutrality. Human rights organizations in Canada and abroad cite unacceptable redirection of aid funds and material, and storage of weapons, and incitement to violence against Israel in UNRWA-operated schools. Why is the government considering new funding to this flawed UN agency?

Ms. Karina Gould (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, UNRWA is entirely funded through voluntary contributions and receives financial support from numerous governments, including its principal donor, the United States, and others such as the United Kingdom. The hon. member seems to have forgotten that in 2012 it was the Conservative government that provided \$15 million in response to UNRWA's request for emergency funding. Our government has not yet taken a decision. We are considering all options for how we can best assist those in the region.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Canada, the B'nai Brith and the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center oppose any new funding for UNRWA. B'nai Brith says Canadian aid for Palestinian welfare must go only to specific humanitarian programs and peaceful infrastructure projects. UN Watch has accused UNRWA staffers of using their official positions to incite Palestinian stabbing and shooting attacks against Israeli Jews.

Can the Liberals not find more appropriate ways to deliver humanitarian aid than to hand it to terrorists?

Ms. Karina Gould (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I would like to remind my colleague that we have yet to take a decision on this funding. However, it is in our best interests as Canadians to look at all options on the table to see how we can best assist those in need in the region.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Development has said that her Liberal government will not have any oversight to ensure that terrorists will not be beneficiaries of Canadian generosity. On the one hand, these terrorists want to harm us, but on the other hand, the Liberal government turns a blind eye to their benefiting from our aid dollars. Why?

Ms. Karina Gould (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it bears repeating that humanitarian assistance is provided to partners around the world. It is to be provided in a neutral, impartial fashion to aid civilians in the midst of conflict. This is the same policy that our government, the previous government, and governments before it in Canada have had. It is our responsibility. We signed on to the Geneva Convention and we are going to do just that.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently the Minister of International Development made some very troubling comments. When asked if Canadian aid could go to ISIS jihadis, she answered yes.

Could the minister confirm that no Canadian foreign aid dollars will go to support jihadi terrorists?

Ms. Karina Gould (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the previous government if it can confirm that none of its humanitarian assistance went to ISIS fighters.

Oral Questions

The fact of the matter is that humanitarian assistance goes towards those in need. We do not discriminate. We send it to our humanitarian partners so they can work effectively in the region. There are millions upon millions of Syrians who need assistance. We are there for them. We are going to help. We are going to work in line with the Geneva Convention.

* * *

•(1435)

PENSIONS

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a new report shows that half of all Canadians aged 55 to 64 have no company pension plan and that their average savings are a shocking \$3,000.

This is further evidence of a retirement security crisis that the Liberals continue to ignore. They promised an immediate boost to the guaranteed income supplement, but left the poor seniors waiting. They promised federal leadership to increase Canada pension plan benefits, but have shown no sign that they even remember making that promise.

Will the Minister of Finance confirm that this year's budget includes a clear commitment to expand the CPP?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for bringing this issue up.

Just this past weekend, we worked together with the Government of Ontario to reconfirm its commitment to working together with the federal government towards a Canada pension plan enhancement.

Our goal is to work together with all provinces and territories to get to a Canada pension plan enhancement, and our aim is to do that in a collaborative way this calendar year.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a study published today by the Broadbent Institute has found that half of all Canadians aged 55 to 64 without a private pension have only enough savings to survive for about one year.

Equally distressing is the fact that over 700,000 Canadian seniors are living in poverty. The Liberals promised to provide more retirement assistance, help our seniors, and enhance pensions.

Can the Minister of Finance commit today to addressing the desperate retirement income needs in the upcoming budget?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to confirm to the House and again to the hon. member that we are working diligently with provinces and territories across this country in order to improve the Canada pension plan, to enhance it so that Canadians can retire in dignity.

We also made important commitments to those Canadians who are most vulnerable, who are seniors, and those are commitments that we intend on moving forward on.

FINANCE

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to do a little recap now that we are back in the House, there were three major promises made by the Liberals before they became government.

One was that any tax changes would be revenue neutral. We know that is not true. Two was that there would be a \$10 billion deficit, a modest one. We think that will not be true. Three, they said they would balance the budget by the end of their mandate, which we understand from press clippings this week is not the case. The Prime Minister told the press agent that, indeed, it would not be going back to balance.

My question for the Minister of Finance is this. Can he at least tell us what the deficit cap will be in the budget?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we believe that the right question to ask is what we are going to do in order to improve the economy for all Canadians.

We were elected on a plan to grow the economy in order to help those Canadians who are struggling, who are most vulnerable, and those middle-class Canadians to do better. We have already moved forward on a tax cut for nine million Canadians. We will be moving forward not only with the Canada child benefit, but also with significant investments in infrastructure to improve the state of our economy.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would give some advice to the Minister of Finance, that when he is making serious promises to serious families with respect to middle income and how much money they are going to have at the end of the day, they better fulfill them, because families are counting on them.

On the Canada child benefit, I have a very specific question for the minister. Now that the government is planning on it being tax free, can the minister confirm for us that the provinces will not be adversely affected by the tax treatment changes to this cheque?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by saying that Canadians elected us on a promise that we would focus on how we can actually help the middle class and those most vulnerable.

We have already moved forward on the promise to help the middle class. We have reduced taxes for nine million Canadians. We are going to move forward on helping those most vulnerable with the Canada child benefit. I can confirm that that is money that will go to the most vulnerable to help them to lead better lives.

•(1440)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister celebrated his first 100 days by spending more money that he does not have, specifically \$319 million on young people. It is an entirely hypocritical gesture, since those same young people will be forced to pay for this deficit spending in the very near future.

Will the Minister of Finance keep his promise and make sure he does not put future generations in debt, and will he ensure that our young people can live within their means and not put them into debt with future taxes?

Oral Questions

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we plan to keep our promise to invest in order to grow the economy while following three principles. This is very important for future generations. We will work to lower the debt-to-GDP ratio throughout our term. We will be disciplined in our spending. We still want to achieve a balanced budget, but we also recognize that it is not going to be easy in this economy.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed because this government has already broken three important promises it made to Canadians and future generations. This government is in denial. The Liberals do not want to acknowledge that they are borrowing money at the expense of future generations. They do not want to admit that they are spending money that they do not have and living beyond their means. They believe that they are going to create wealth by spending money they do not have. Actually, it will be business people who create wealth by making investments.

Will this government stop being stubborn and balance the books as quickly as possible for the benefit of future generations?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. member that we were elected on a plan to actually grow the economy. Canadians understand that after 10 years of weak growth it is time to grow the economy. We are going to make investments in the short term that are going to help our economy, but we are going to focus on investments that over the long term will ensure a more productive Canada. That will help Canadians today and Canadians tomorrow and will get us, over the long term, back into budget balance.

* * *

LABOUR

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, youth unemployment is soaring in our country, and as a result many young people are being pushed into exploitative internships. In the last Parliament, the Liberal caucus voted for the NDP's intern protection act, legislation which would have provided many in the millennial generation with necessary protections. However, now the Liberal government is pushing ahead with the Conservative's plan instead, allowing unpaid, exploitative internships to continue unchecked. Will the minister drop this misguided approach and adopt the NDP's plan to protect young workers instead?

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the consultation period on the issue of paid interns and unpaid interns has just concluded. It is important for us to see what Canadians say and think on the issue. It is also important for us to establish a regulatory framework that is going to protect those people who are in paid or unpaid internships in Canada. That is exactly what we intend to do.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the abusive use of unpaid internships is an epidemic. Young people have had enough of precarious work. The NDP decided to tackle this problem by introducing a bill to protect interns in the last Parliament. The Liberals had agreed to support it. However, now that

they are in power, the Liberals are moving forward with the Conservatives' plan to legalize abusive, unpaid internships. That is quite disappointing, especially since we know that the Canadian Intern Association has withdrawn from the minister's consultations.

Will the government reverse its decision and put an end to the exploitation of unpaid interns?

[*English*]

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is our intention to end all abuse to interns. Secondly, the conclusion of the hearings was when this organization decided to withdraw. The consultations are over and it is our intention to end the abuse of interns.

* * *

• (1445)

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Tuesday, the Minister of Canadian Heritage attended the groundbreaking ceremony to kick off the renovation of the National Arts Centre.

Can the minister explain how this investment will benefit Canada's arts and culture sector?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question.

In 1967, the National Arts Centre was seen as a legacy of the 100th anniversary of Confederation. It was inaugurated in 1969 by one Pierre Elliott Trudeau. We are pleased to announce the centre's renovation for the 150th anniversary of Confederation.

[*English*]

Our investment of \$110 million will make sure that the National Arts Centre will be a state-of-the-art facility. It will open on July 1, 2017 for the 150th anniversary of Confederation. I hope everybody in the House will be present.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently in Calgary, the Minister of Natural Resources actually said that decisions on pipelines like energy east would be political decisions made by cabinet in the same way that budget decisions are made. That is a little scary in and of itself. So much for the process and so much for the Canadian regulator.

There are thousands of Canadians out of work who want to work on projects like energy east. Exactly what is the criteria that the Prime Minister and cabinet will be using to make these political decisions on pipelines?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was legislative changes made by the other government that led to cabinet being asked to make important decisions on great national projects. A political decision is a decision for which politicians are held accountable. We will be held accountable after a process that will have the confidence of the Canadian people and that will have a chance to play out in a reasonable way and a robust way.

When all of that is done, the government will take responsibility for the decision it takes.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is absolutely politicizing a process, and, in the midst of it, Liberals are laughing while tens of thousands of jobs are being lost in Alberta, New Brunswick, and across the country.

We also know that without energy east, Canadian refineries are forced to import foreign oil. Can the minister tell us if he is looking at what the upstream emissions are for the oil shipped to New Brunswick from Venezuela and Saudi Arabia, or is there one standard for Canadian oil and no standard for foreign oil?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we announced several weeks ago a new process that will lead to a better regulatory process for Canada. We know from experience over the last five and six years that that process has not carried the support of Canadians. Therefore, no projects have actually come to fruition since 2011.

We are not going to repeat a failed process. We are going to introduce a new one that has a better chance of holding the confidence of the Canadian people and therefore leads to a result in which more Canadians can have confidence than they were able to under the previous government.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is shocking that the Liberals are laughing about this. It seems that they care more about supporting Saudi Arabia than they do about workers in Alberta.

The Liberals' anti-energy plan is not working for Canadians. Instead of supporting Canadian pipelines, Canadian resources, and Canadian jobs, Liberals are propping up foreign oil. Over 22,000 Albertans lost their full-time jobs just last month. Energy east would allow Canadians to have access to Canadian resources and create Canadian jobs.

When will the Liberals get out of the way and allow Canadians to get back to work?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand that low commodity prices have a consequence for families and for individuals in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland and Labrador. When the government was in New Brunswick, it was able to feel the impact of a mine closure first-hand. We understand that.

We are looking at the long term to have a more robust regulatory system. We understand the importance of moving our natural resources to market sustainably. That is our objective. The process that we have introduced will give us a better chance of getting there.

• (1450)

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, some of the Liberals believe they are more qualified to make important

regulatory decisions than the arm's-length National Energy Board. Meanwhile, the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of Canadians are at risk while shovel-ready, privately funded pipeline projects sit waiting and unemployment rates soar.

The Liberals are undermining the credibility of our world-renowned regulatory system. Can the minister please explain how his rookie government is more qualified to make these decisions than the experts at the NEB?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad for the question, because as the member knows, we will be modernizing the National Energy Board. We will be looking for advice from all members of the House in taking the regulatory system in Canada and improving it.

I look forward to having conversations with the members opposite about their ideas to get a more robust process, to lead, not only to a better result, but any result at all.

* * *

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the federal government has provided tens of millions of dollars to the Global Transportation Hub near Regina, but now this crown corporation is mired in a controversial land deal that saw it pay more than twice what the land was worth to sellers with connections to the governing Sask Party. There have been calls for an RCMP investigation.

Will the Government of Canada undertake its own investigation to ensure that no federal funds were wasted in the suspicious Sask Party deal?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, decisions made by local governments are decisions made by local governments. Our role as a federal government is to support local decision-making. That is why we have committed \$60 billion of new money to support community-based infrastructure, based on decisions made by local government.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in opposition, the Liberals voted against the Conservative's measures to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board. In fact, their leader at the time called the bill to kill the Wheat Board an affront to the rule of law. The Conservatives sold off half of the Wheat Board's assets to the Saudi-owned G3 Global Grain Group, leaving Canadian grain farmers to suffer \$6.5 billion in lost income in the last two years.

When will the current government listen to grain farmers and restore the Canadian Wheat Board?

Oral Questions

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think we are all aware of who ended the Canadian Wheat Board. However, I can assure members that this government will focus on its priorities for the sector, including an opening up of new trade rules to make sure that farmers receive proper remuneration for their grain. This government will make sure of that.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently media reports have surfaced indicating that the Irvings and members of the cabinet met in Moncton, New Brunswick last week. The government House leader is very familiar with Moncton and the Irving family.

Given the recent sanctions brought down on the government House leader, can he explain to the House what role he played in facilitating these meetings between the Irvings and the Liberal government?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, only that member would find a proactive effort to engage with the Ethics Commissioner days after the swearing in, to disclose to her a long-standing personal relationship and family friendship that I have had with the Irvings to which there has never been any financial component, and seek her advice in order to set up the appropriate measures to ensure that I am never in a conflict of interest or an appearance of a conflict of interest. I followed the Ethics Commissioner's advice, and I will continue to do so. The hon. member obviously is struggling with that basic concept.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was not an answer.

Since the Liberals have been in office, the House leader has been tied to questionable fundraising practices; he has tried to intimidate judges and tribunal members. Now the Ethics Commissioner has told him that he needs an ethical wall between himself and the Irvings.

We have seen these so-called ethical walls put in place before with this member. How realistic is it to expect the Liberal government minister from New Brunswick not to deal with the Irving family when it is the biggest economic influence in the province? It just does not add up.

• (1455)

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to reassure the hon. member and the House that the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development meets daily with key stakeholders and key business people across the country. He meets with them and will continue to meet with them to make sure that we build a strong business climate for quality jobs for Canadians. However, let me confirm to this House that neither the government House leader nor anyone else from his office participated in that meeting last week.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development was in New Brunswick. He met with members of the Irving family, including some who are personal friends of the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Can the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons confirm that he was not at that meeting, that he did not facilitate it, that he was not aware of the discussions, and that he abided by the conflict of interest screen that prevents him from taking part in discussions between Irving Limited and the government?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

* * *

[English]

PARKS CANADA

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I worked in Parks Canada for over three decades where I managed the national historic sites program in my region.

I worked with communities to recognize persons, places and events that had profound importance to Canadians. Under the previous government, this program was neglected and caused a huge backlog in designations.

Would the Minister of Environment tell me what her plan is to deal with this issue?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I commend the hon. member for his great work.

[Translation]

Yesterday, the government was proud to announce 38 designations of historic sites, persons, and events, which helps us establish a link between our common history and the heart and soul of Canadians.

Our government is committed to considering all designation recommendations in a timely manner. We are working with communities across Canada to provide Canadians the opportunity to unite around our common history.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in December I asked the Minister of Environment why she chose to violate section 36 of the Fisheries Act and allow Montreal to dump eight billion litres of sewage into the St. Lawrence. The government had no answer.

A consultant's report described this discharge, but it was clearly not a formal environmental assessment. An Environment Canada's disclaimer said in this report, "These results might not reflect the Department of the Environment's views".

Oral Questions

The Liberals are always claiming the moral high ground on the environment, so why did the minister authorize this illegal discharge of toxic material in violation of section 36 of the Fisheries Act?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to see that the City of Montreal was able to limit the impact of the discharge.

The City of Montreal continues to abide by the conditions set out in the ministerial order of November 9, 2015. It has heightened its monitoring of water quality in the St. Lawrence River and is sending the data to my department.

* * *

[*English*]

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have learned today that child homelessness has jumped 50% in the last decade. One of every seven users of homeless shelters is a child. Those numbers are heartbreaking and demand urgent action now.

[*Translation*]

We must be proactive and invest immediately in social housing and in a national anti-poverty strategy. We cannot let this situation get worse, but the government continues to be vague about its plan.

When does this government plan on investing in social housing and preventing child homelessness?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question. I agree that it is important to invest in social housing.

In recent weeks, I had the opportunity to meet with many stakeholders and partners who are concerned about this issue. We are working with the provinces and municipalities, and I encourage the member to keep an eye out for further developments in the coming weeks.

* * *

[*English*]

FINANCE

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a Statistics Canada revision to the territorial formula financing in December had people in my riding of Northwest Territories, as well as people in Yukon and Nunavut, worried about their territorial governments' ability to plan ahead for the 2016-17 fiscal year.

The Minister of Finance pledged to identify options for addressing the impact of recent data revisions on territorial financial planning. Would the minister please update the House on what progress has been made on this file?

• (1500)

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague, along with my colleagues the member for Yukon and the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, for advocating on this issue.

Canadians expect their governments to work together. We have collaborated with the three territories to make the territorial funding formula more stable and predictable over time.

Today I am pleased to announce that I will be introducing an amendment to the formula. It will enable the government to recalculate the 2016-17 payments, which will provide an additional \$67 million to territories compared to the amounts calculated in December.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is abandoning Ukraine. While he seeks warmer relations with the Putin regime, his government is refusing to support the vital work of the Office of Religious Freedom, which is actively countering Russian-backed human rights violations in the region.

I have a simple question for the minister. Will the Office of Religious Freedom's vital work in eastern Ukraine be allowed to continue after March 31?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I have strong regard for the competence of the head of this office, and I am pleased he is still working with us. Second, we want to protect as much as possible the freedom of religion everywhere in the world, and we want to do so in an optimal way. We are looking at our options.

* * *

[*Translation*]

JUSTICE

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the recent incidents involving runaways from a Laval group home have drawn attention to the plight of vulnerable young girls who are under the control of pimps and have emphasized the urgent need for action.

Bill C-452 was unanimously passed by the House, passed by the Senate and given royal assent by the Governor General, but it is still waiting for a government order to come into force. Nevertheless, it is considered an essential tool for protecting our young people from sexual exploitation.

What is the government waiting for? When will it sign this order and immediately give effect to this bill to combat child prostitution?

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our thoughts and prayers are with those young women and their families. The disappearance of a child is a tragedy, particularly under such circumstances.

We are determined to achieve the important objectives of Bill C-452. I can guarantee that we will act quickly in a way that reflects our values and complies with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

*Business of Supply***AEROSPACE INDUSTRY**

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with the potential sale of Rona to the American giant Lowe's looming, Quebec is concerned about losing its companies.

Now, we have learned that before the government will give Bombardier a line of credit, it is asking the company to do away with its multiple-voting shares, when such shares are helping to protect the company from a hostile foreign takeover.

Is the minister aware that with a 70¢ dollar and 80¢ shares, everything is coming together to trigger the buyout and dismantling of Bombardier?

Why does the minister want to kill the aerospace industry in Quebec?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the aerospace industry is one of Canada's most innovative industries. It is also export-oriented, which is very important for the Canadian economy.

The federal government is in discussions with Bombardier and the Government of Quebec in order to make a decision as quickly as possible. I can assure the House of Commons and the hon. member that any investments will be in Canadians' best interests.

* * *

[English]

GURBAX SINGH SOHI

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to remember Gurbax Singh Sohi, the father of the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, who passed away last night at the age of 101. Despite his age, he was enthusiastically knocking on doors with his son during the election campaign because he knew that his passionate, dedicated, extraordinary son had much to offer to all Canadians.

Since being sworn in, the hon. Minister of Infrastructure has been working tirelessly on behalf of Canadians from coast to coast to coast. I am certain members of the House would agree that the minister's father would be extremely proud of his accomplishments.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the minister and his family as they mourn their father, Gurbax Singh Sohi.

* * *

• (1505)

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Lena Metlege Diab, Minister of Immigration for the Province of Nova Scotia.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Gerhard Herzberg Canada Gold Medal for Science and Engineering prize winner Dr. Victoria Kaspi and the John C. Polanyi Prize winner Dr. Barbara Sherwood Lollar.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: Also with us are the winners of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council Synergy Awards for Innovation, Steacie Memorial Fellowships and Gilles Brassard Doctoral Prize for Interdisciplinary Research.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION — DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE

The House resumed from February 4 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: It being 3:08 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the opposition motion regarding the business of supply.

Call in the members.

• (1515)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 13)

YEAS

Members

| | |
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| Aboultaif | Albas |
| Albrecht | Allison |
| Ambrose | Anderson |
| Angus | Arnold |
| Ashton | Aubin |
| Barlow | Benson |
| Bergen | Bernier |
| Berthold | Bezan |
| Blaikie | Blaney (North Island—Powell River) |
| Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis) | Block |
| Boucher | Boulerice |
| Boutin-Sweet | Brassard |
| Brosseau | Brown |
| Calkins | Cannings |
| Caron | Carrie |
| Choquette | Christopherson |
| Clarke | Cooper |
| Cullen | Davies |
| Deltell | Diotte |
| Doherty | Dreeshen |
| Dubé | Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona) |
| Dusseau | Duvall |
| Eglinski | Falk |
| Fast | Finley |
| Garrison | Généreux |
| Genus | Gladu |
| Godin | Gourde |
| Hardcastle | Hoback |
| Hughes | Jeneroux |
| Johns | Jolibois |
| Julian | Kelly |
| Kent | Kitchen |
| Kniec | Kwan |
| Lake | Laverdière |
| Leitch | Liepert |
| Lobb | Lukiwski |
| MacGregor | MacKenzie |
| Maguire | Malcolmson |
| Masse (Windsor West) | McCauley (Edmonton West) |
| McColeman | McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo) |
| Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound) | Moore |

Government Orders

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|--------------|--------------|
| Mulcair | Nantel |
| Nater | Nicholson |
| Nuttall | Obhrai |
| O'Toole | Poilievre |
| Quach | Raitt |
| Ramsey | Rankin |
| Rayes | Reid |
| Rempel | Richards |
| Ritz | Sansoucy |
| Saroya | Scheer |
| Schmale | Shields |
| Shipley | Sopuck |
| Sorenson | Stanton |
| Stetski | Stewart |
| Strahl | Stubbs |
| Sweet | Tilson |
| Trost | Trudel |
| Van Kesteren | Van Loan |
| Vecchio | Viersen |
| Wagantall | Warawa |
| Warkentin | Watts |
| Waugh | Webber |
| Weir | Wong |
| Yurdiga | Zimmer — 130 |

NAYS

Members

| | |
|---|-----------------------|
| Aldag | Alghabra |
| Alleslev | Amos |
| Anandasangaree | Arseneault |
| Arya | Ayoub |
| Badawey | Bagnell |
| Barsalou-Duval | Baylis |
| Beaulieu | Beech |
| Bélanger | Bennett |
| Bittle | Blair |
| Boissonnault | Bossio |
| Boudrias | Bratina |
| Breton | Brisson |
| Caesar-Chavannes | Carr |
| Casey (Cumberland—Colchester) | Casey (Charlottetown) |
| Chagger | Champagne |
| Chan | Chen |
| Cormier | Cuzner |
| Dabrusin | Damoff |
| DeCoursey | Dhaliwal |
| Dhillon | Di Iorio |
| Dion | Drouin |
| Duclos | Duguid |
| Duncan (Etobicoke North) | Dzerowicz |
| Easter | Ehsassi |
| El-Khoury | Ellis |
| Erskine-Smith | Eyking |
| Eyolfson | Fergus |
| Fillmore | Finnigan |
| Fisher | Fonseca |
| Foote | Fortin |
| Fraser (West Nova) | Fraser (Central Nova) |
| Freeland | Fry |
| Fuhr | Gameau |
| Gerretsen | Gill |
| Goldsmith-Jones | Gould |
| Graham | Grewal |
| Hajdu | Hardie |
| Harvey | Hehr |
| Holland | Housefather |
| Hussen | Hutchings |
| Joly | Jones |
| Jordan | Jowhari |
| Kang | Khalid |
| Khera | Lametti |
| Lamoureux | Lapointe |
| Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation) | LeBlanc |
| Lebouthillier | Lefebvre |
| Lemieux | Leslie |
| Levitt | Lightbound |
| Lockhart | Long |
| Longfield | Ludwig |
| MacAulay (Cardigan) | Maloney |
| Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia) | |
| May (Cambridge) | |
| May (Saanich—Gulf Islands) | McCrimmon |

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|---------------------------------------|--|
| McDonald | McGuinty |
| McKay | McKenna |
| McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam) | McLeod (Northwest Territories) |
| Mendès | Mendicino |
| Mihychuk | Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs) |
| Monsef | Morneau |
| Morrissey | Murray |
| Nassif | Nault |
| O'Connell | Oliphant |
| Oliver | O'Regan |
| Ouellette | Paradis |
| Paupé | Peterson |
| Petitpas Taylor | Philpott |
| Picard | Plamondon |
| Qualtrough | Ratansi |
| Rioux | Robillard |
| Rodriguez | Romanado |
| Rudd | Ruimy |
| Rusnak | Sahota |
| Saini | Sajjan |
| Samson | Sangha |
| Scarpaleggia | Schieffe |
| Schulte | Serré |
| Sgro | Shanahan |
| Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon) | Sidhu (Brampton South) |
| Sikand | Simms |
| Sohi | Sorbara |
| Spengemann | Ste-Marie |
| Tabbara | Tassi |
| Thériault | Tootoo |
| Trudeau | Vandal |
| Vandenbeld | Vaughan |
| Virani | Whalen |
| Wrzesnewskyj | Young |
| Zahid — 177 | |

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

* * *

● (1520)

[English]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-4, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded divisions, government orders will be extended by nine minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand in this House to speak to Bill C-4, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act.

This bill would finally repeal the devastating attack that the former Conservative government launched against working people across this country. The two bills that would be repealed were known in the 41st Parliament as Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. These bills were not only mean-spirited attacks on unions, but they were, as Jack Layton said in his last speech to the House, part of a larger agenda by a government that preyed on the concept of dividing Canadians one from the other.

Government Orders

New Democrats fought relentlessly against these Conservative anti-union bills, and we certainly welcome the changes of the new Liberal government. I remember when Bill C-377 was pushed through Parliament against the tide of not just labour organizations but also constitutional and privacy experts. There was opposition from the insurance and mutual fund industry, the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, even the Canadian Bar Association, and the National Hockey League Players' Association.

To go on about the constitutionality of the bill, the Conservatives were never good at working within our Constitution. They constantly went head-to-head with the judiciary in this country, losing big battles whenever they put Conservative legislation before Canadian constitutional values. They lost on mandatory minimums, time-served sentencing, and even tried to break a rule to allow an ineligible judge to sit on the Supreme Court of Canada.

A few years ago a whistle-blower from the Department of Justice brought to light the fact that the government was not fully vetting its legislation to see if it was constitutional or not. When Bill C-377 was tabled, it came as no surprise that the Privacy Commissioner of Canada stated that the bill would ultimately be defeated by the courts, because it went against the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This bill would violate freedom of association and the private lives of those workers who were unionized.

Now I will move on to the details of Bill C-377. It was a law that was discriminatory and imposed onerous and detailed reporting requirements on labour organizations. It was designed as a method to crush union finances and bury any action under bureaucratic red tape. Unions already do fully transparent reporting to their membership, as do many organizations and other associations that this bill did not cover.

Labour organizations were suddenly going to be subject to public, outside of their membership, disclosure to everyone. No other association would be forced to do anything similar. Why were the unions the only ones targeted? What about the clubs, the think tanks, the religious organizations, and even the council of chief executives? They were all left out.

Law societies and the Canadian Medical Association were also not subject to this law. It was a bill that was designed as a clear attack on workers' rights.

Bill C-377 was not only an ill-advised method of dividing Canadians, it was also extremely expensive. The parliamentary budget officer, a position created by the Conservative government, stated that it would cost the Canada Revenue Agency approximately \$21 million to establish the electronic database for the first two years, and approximately \$2.1 million per year for subsequent years.

The bill was so contentious that even Conservative Party senators fought against it. I should note the great Conservative Hugh Segal among other things mentioned that it would violate the privacy of millions, would tilt the advantage towards employers during negotiations, and was basically a declaration of war against workers. He felt it was unconstitutional and discriminatory, and was not even a dignified way to govern this country.

Repealing this bill would save millions of dollars annually, both for the government and for labour organizations. Bill C-525 was a

law designed to harm and diminish unions by making it much more difficult for workers to collectively form a union, and making it much easier for a union to be decertified.

The government pushed hard for these private members' bills to be passed back in the day. It marked a trend by the Conservatives to take contentious attacks and place them in private members' bills so they were subject to less scrutiny and debate than full government legislation would have been.

Many stakeholders who were directly affected by the legislation have also applauded the government for its plan to repeal the two private members' bills.

• (1525)

The president of the Canadian Labour Congress has been clear that these pieces of legislation were nothing more than an attempt to undermine a union's ability to do important work like protecting jobs, promoting health and safety in the workplace, and advocating on behalf of all Canadian workers.

In their attempt to divide Canadians, the Conservatives have always liked to attack unionized workers, as though they are the privileged of Canadian society who do nothing to help the non-unionized. The truth of course is very different. Workers and unions spend their paycheques in local communities like mine in Cowichan—Malahat—Langford. Their incomes support local businesses, and they bolster our tax base, which adds to everyone's quality of life.

The benefits that are often enjoyed by unionized workers attract and support crucial care infrastructure, such as dentists, therapists, opticians, and family lawyers, to help build vibrant communities, not to mention that the money that unionized workers contribute to their pension plan comes back to them so that they can spend it in the community. It also means that fewer workers need to rely on family or social programs to get by.

When unions have the power to stand up for fairness, they raise the bar for everyone. We can thank the labour movement for its victories in securing parental leave, workplace safety standards, minimum wages, vacation pay, and protection from discrimination and harassment for all workers in this country. It is clear that these laws had to go, and we applaud the Liberals for being on the correct side of this fight and for quickly moving to repeal this legislation.

We also know that the struggle for fair working conditions is far from over. New Democrats will continue to push the government to restore and enhance collective bargaining rights, as well as fairer working conditions for all Canadians. The fight continues as our very own NDP member for Jonquière is proposing anti-scab legislation to ensure fairness and balance in labour negotiations. The prohibition against using replacement workers would protect the interests of working Canadians and their families against the might of large, powerful, and global employers.

Government Orders

The New Democratic Party has deep roots in the lives of working people. After all, our party was created out of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation and the Canadian Labour Congress to be the voice of the regular working family. We follow that tradition closely, as we are proud of being the only unionized political party, where our employees have a say in their workplace.

The Liberals should be applauded for working in Parliament to give collective bargaining rights to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. We trust that they will continue this trend and work with their own employees to grant them collective bargaining rights as well.

Workers in my community have brought to my attention that there are more and more part-time and contractual employees in the riding, and more needs to be done to protect them. The last review of the Canada Labour Code was done 10 years ago, in 2006. There were recommendations that came out of that review, which would specifically help precarious and part-time workers in my riding, but they were never fully implemented. New Democrats will be working hard to push the Liberals in acting on these recommendations. Part-time and contractual employees deserve the same fairness that we demand for all workers across this country.

The Canada Labour Code needs to be updated and modernized. There are sections in the code that are at least 60 years out of date. Repealing Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 are important first steps. However, it is important that we do not sit back and congratulate ourselves, as sections of our Canada Labour Code dealing with harassment, hours of work, overtime pay, and vacation entitlements need major updates.

When Tommy Douglas was premier of Saskatchewan, he knew that securing basic workers' rights was key to a just and prosperous society. He was able to get ideas from working people and implement them for the benefit of all. Tommy passed legislation establishing a 40-hour work week, paid vacations, and collective bargaining rights for all workers. Conservatives have tried to turn back the clock and strip workers of the vested rights they fought so hard to achieve. We now have much to do to enshrine protections for working families across this country.

Working people in my riding know that repealing Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 are important first steps. New Democrats will be there to hold the government's feet to the fire to ensure that we continue bettering the lives of workers from coast to coast to coast.

• (1530)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome my colleague from the NDP to the chamber. I am sure, as he starts his career here in the House of Commons, there will be many issues on which we will disagree, but certainly on this one we are very much like-minded.

As we went through the study on Bill C-377, there were a number of comments made regarding the legislation, saying this was the same legislation, for the most part, as George Bush brought in as Republican legislation in the United States. We were able to witness one of the standard claims that was filed in the United States, and it was around 745 pages. It was a pretty impressive document.

The charity in Canada that records the highest amount of revenue is a hospital in Toronto. When it files, it has one of the most comprehensive, detailed filings for a charity in the country. It is 24 pages. It is pretty impressive when they are stacked up beside each other. The Conservatives contended that this was just about openness and clarity, and that we ask charities to do that. Does he see the difference between what is asked of charities and what was being asked of organized labour? Does he see that there was something else behind the motivation, other than openness and transparency?

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, absolutely there was something behind this. There is, any time a single organization is subjected to this kind of onerous paperwork. Obviously, the thing that was behind it all was to tie them up in red tape and make a union an ineffective voice for the workers in their particular jurisdiction.

I agree with the member that there certainly was a method, with the very fact that these same rules were not applied to other professional associations, clubs, or religious organizations. It was only unions that were singled out by the bill. The fact is that unions are already extremely accountable to their workers. Workers can replace the leadership of the union if it is not doing a good job. They have to open their finances. They already have to do reporting to the CRA. The bill was simply another level of red tape to completely kneecap them.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we talk about the importance of labour and management relations. As a government, whether federal or provincial, we should be encouraging harmony and consensus wherever we can. It is healthy for the Canadian economy when we see that harmony within.

In relation to jurisdiction, we have seen many labour laws look toward provincial jurisdiction. For example, there is anti-scab legislation that was introduced at the provincial level. I wonder if the member could provide some thoughts or his comments in regard to the importance of respecting some of the provincial jurisdictional issues, in particular with respect to some of the labour laws we have in Canada today, and not to underestimate the provincial governments' role in that area.

• (1535)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague from Jonquière will be introducing a bill for anti-scab legislation. I certainly think she is much more qualified than I am to defend her particular bill. However, when it comes to respecting jurisdiction between the federal realm and the provincial realm, absolutely, we do have to have a crystal clear definition between the two.

However, there is also an important role for the federal government to play in leadership. That is why the NDP was proud to stand for a \$15 per hour minimum wage. We knew it would encourage provincial jurisdictions to follow suit. Similarly, if we show the same leadership in the federal arena, we are hoping our provincial cousins will also follow suit.

Government Orders

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, oftentimes in this place we refer to industry or we refer to the labour movement or organized labour when we are discussing policy. Certainly industry is an important terminology. We across the aisle come up with policy or try to come up with policy that encourages industry to develop, because industry creates jobs for Canadians, and oftentimes when we refer to organized labour or unions, we have to acknowledge that there has been a significant impact of organized labour in the western world over time in ensuring fairness and equality for workers' treatment. However, with respect to this bill here, I would like to pause and not talk about industry and not talk about organized labour, but actually talk about workers. I think we have to do that because of where we are in Canada right now.

I cannot get up in this place and talk about any sort of policy related to workers or the economy without bringing it back to my riding. I cannot stress enough how important it is for everyone in this House to understand that there are more than 100,000 people who have been laid off in the energy sector in Alberta and what that means to the Canadian economy. These are not just numbers. They are not just statistics on unemployment. They are people in my riding. They are our brothers and our sisters. They are family members. They are our neighbours. They are people's husbands and wives. They are accountants. They are administrative professional. They are rig hands. They are every single part of the economy, and they pay taxes. They try to make ends meet for their kids.

If we are going to talk about organizations that help create jobs or help support workers, we first have to focus on workers themselves. I think it is important to do that to reframe this debate today, because this is the first piece of legislation that the government has put out in the House with regard to supporting workers.

My colleague who just gave a speech talked about how unions were the voice of the regular working family. I would like to think that we here are also the voice of regular working families.

Therefore, if we look at the first piece of legislation that the government has put in place to support workers, what would it do?

We have 100,000-plus people in Alberta whose severance pay is running out. This does not even take into consideration the contractors who have been laid off, the ripple effects down through the service industry. There are a lot of people out of work in my riding, and the first piece of legislation that the Government of Canada puts forward with regard to workers would do the following: it would remove transparency measures for union leaders to report how they are spending their members' union dues; and it would remove the secret ballot provision for union formation.

I could spend the duration of my time talking about that particular issue and its merits. I know that has been debated over and over again.

However, I have to tell members that it does not cut it for me to go back to my riding and report in a householder or in a town hall meeting what the government is doing, what the government's priority is for those who are out of work and for those who know they are going to be in the next round layoffs, that the priority is

those two things. Is the government kidding me? That is not going to get somebody's job back.

This is the government's first piece of legislation. There are so many things it could have done for workers, for people, not for industry, not for big labour, but for workers, the people who are actually out of work in my province.

It could ensure that we keep taxes low. We know that, when we have a low-tax system, we see the economy grow because people have more in their wallets to spend, to make ends meet. We know that companies have more flexibility and freedom to be able to make investments, which create jobs. We could keep taxes low.

Are we doing that? No, we are not. We are hearing signals that the government wants to increase taxes on job-creating companies while people are out of work and cannot make ends meet. We know that the government has signalled that it wants to increase CPP premiums. I do not know about other members, but I can certainly tell them right now that it does not help somebody who is out of work or who is looking for a job. The last thing people need is more money coming off their paycheques every week. I certainly am not comfortable telling people in my riding that is what the government is doing and it is a fantastic thing that is going to create jobs.

● (1540)

The government has also signalled that it is going to increase EI premiums. What would that do and why is that important for workers? Once again, it will be more money off their paycheques. Anyone running a small business or looking to create jobs in the economy right now will have to pay more premiums. Does anyone think that will facilitate more job creation? No. It is crazy. Anyone who has looked at those types of programs in this economy has said that it will put a further chill on the economy.

These are the government's actual priorities for people who are out of work in my riding right now, and it is worth getting mad about. Furthermore, to rub salt into this wound, the government has added a layer of regulatory uncertainty. That is a very unsexy way of saying that it has made it more difficult for the energy sector to do business.

The government has signalled in recent weeks that rather than having a clearly defined arm's-length process in which it will rely on a third party and scientific evidence to make an assessment of a major energy project, which would create jobs, the government has said that it is going to rely on a political process. Again, this is not about driving just to a yes, but to a yes or a no under set parameters, where industry knows what is happening in a scientific review process, so that investments can be made with some level of certainty.

The government is not sure what is going to happen. If it goes through with this new process it is putting in place, it may or may not accept that recommendation.

What do members think that would do for the average worker, since we are talking about workers here? It means that we do not know if these projects are going to start one way or another, even if they meet the parameters that have been laid out by the government. It is like holding your finger in the wind and seeing which way the popular winds are blowing. That is not a way to create jobs. That is not a way to stand up for workers. That is the government's priority.

Government Orders

The Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, who tabled this as her first bill and priority to “protect workers”, has said nothing about attracting or retaining skilled labour in my province as it goes through a major period of unemployment. She has not talked about the fact that when skilled labourers have to leave because they cannot make ends meet in my province, it will affect future increases in investment and job creation down the road. No, she tabled this bill to take away secret ballots. That is the priority. That is crazy. I cannot understand this.

I am standing in this place and making this speech. My stepfather is an electrician and a long-time union member. My brother-in-law is an electrician and a union member. I was a union member. One of my first jobs was in a union. I have managed in a union situation. I understand what it is like to be a unionized worker and to have family members who are in a unionized environment. At the end of the day, what is important is people having jobs, and I have heard absolutely nothing from the government in the past weeks in Parliament showing how the government is going to help grow the economy. In fact, it has been quite the opposite.

What I find very interesting in my personal journey here is that the minister who tabled this piece of legislation as the government's top priority for workers was the NDP provincial minister of industry when I was 19 years old in Manitoba and looking at where I would start my career. That was the beginning of an interesting period for Manitoba.

It is amazing how history repeats itself. If we are talking about who is the voice for the regular working family and workers in Canada, I hope we can send a message to Canadians that the government putting this forward as its top priority, when there are so many other things that need to be done in this country and in my riding for the people who are out of work, is absolutely ridiculous. It is crazy.

I will not stand by. I will certainly be a strong voice for my constituents in saying that what the Liberals have done here is wrong.

• (1545)

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there are people out of work across this country and our hearts go out to them, their families, and their communities, which are also suffering because people do not have jobs. One of the things Liberals recognize is that the labour movement in this country has been critical to our getting to the point we are at as employees, as employers, and as companies. It is about protection, it is about safety, it is about a number of things.

My question is this. At what point does my hon. colleague think this is important?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Madam Speaker, it is not enough to say that her party's heart goes out to the people in my riding. Every time the government stands up and puts more regulatory uncertainties into the energy industry, raises CPP premiums, raises EI premiums, raises taxes on businesses, their heart does not go out to them. Liberals are doing them a disservice.

At what point do we stand up for workers? It is when we think strongly about how economic policy is actually affecting the growth

of business. This is not an academic exercise; these are people's lives and people's jobs.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, one of the things that businesses greatly dislike when looking for investment or for continuing to invest is uncertainty and conflict. One of the things that we have known increasingly as the participation rate falls in the labour markets over a number of years—less in the public sector, but certainly dramatically in the private sector—is that it has led to more unrest and uncertainty as collective agreements are no longer the norm in the private sector and businesses do not have that ability to go out and make those investments knowing what their labour costs would be.

I would also suggest, and perhaps the member would like to comment on this, is that the amount of uncertainty and conflict created around the energy and resource sectors by the previous government increased companies' inability to invest. There was so much strife and the degrading of our environmental laws. There was so much conflict between the previous governments and organized labour right across the country, both public and private, that the very low to terrible growth rates this country had during the member's government's time in office is a direct reflection of policies made in part at the cabinet level by the previous government.

We all look for certainty. We all look to support those working families. One of those ways is to have good collective agreements between workers and the employers who employ them.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Madam Speaker, to the people listening at home, my colleague opposite would have them believe his rhetoric, but here are the facts. Canada had one of the highest GDP growth rates over recessionary levels. People can look at the budget we tabled last year and see those figures, compared to our peer G7 countries. When we talk about regulatory certainty, the member makes it seem like Canada is somehow North Korea in terms of environmental assessment. The fact remains that Canada has one of the most stringent, robust, and arm's-length environmental assessment processes for major natural resource projects.

The New Democrats cannot quantify that degradation of the environment. They cannot quantify that because it is not fair. We actually have one of the strongest assessment frameworks here, but the key thing they do not like is the certainty of it. They want to be able to politically interfere in that process, and that is not right. One way or the other, yes or no, what we need is a process that is stable and certain and we need government policy that supports workers. That means lower taxes and ensuring that families are thought of rather than just special interest groups, major union bosses, and even big CEOs. This is about Canadian families and I hope that we can come together on that policy somehow, in some way, in this Parliament.

Government Orders

• (1550)

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join the debate. It also happens to be my first appropriate opportunity to make a few acknowledgements. I hope, Madam Speaker, you will allow me that latitude.

First, congratulations, Madam Speaker, on your re-election to this great place and on your ascension to being one of our deputy Speakers. You are already doing a fantastic job and I know you will be dispatching fairness and justice on a regular basis for all of us.

Most important, and probably the most important words I will utter in this whole term, is to thank my constituents of Hamilton Centre for the honour of being returned to this place. This is my fifth term here, and after having been around for a while, I begin to think that at some point they will get tired of me. That day is coming. It may not be here yet. I am looking over and I see my friend from Flamborough—Glanbrook laughing, and he knows there is still a good chunk of people who wish I were not here. Nonetheless, I got enough to garner them together to get here. In all sincerity, though, there is no greater honour, as everyone knows, whether brand new here or having served here longer than I, than that feeling we have every time we walk in here and take our place in the House. It is such an honour and I thank my constituents of Hamilton Centre for that honour. I will do my best to make them feel proud of that decision.

To the matter at hand, I found the last speech quite interesting. It was quite the dance. There was no music, but a lot of dancing going on. It started in one place, moved to another place, and had the discussion go over here. When they are in opposition it is always said that, “It is not that we do not like unions, it is not that we are opposed to working people. We just have this particular problem here, here and here”. The next thing we know, they are bridging over and talking about some other darn thing.

I remember when these bills were brought in and how proud the now official opposition members were to go after the labour movement. At best, they believe that the labour movement has had its purpose, but that its purpose has now gone by and unions are no longer needed.

I would like to place on the record a 2002 study that was done of a thousand other studies on the effect of unions on national economies. In that report, it said that “high levels of unionization lead to higher income equality, lower unemployment and inflation, higher productivity and speedier adjustments to economic shocks.” One can only begin to imagine what kind of raving lefty would have come out with such socialistic discussions about the impact of unions on our society, and yet the author was the World Bank.

I heard the previous speaker talk about her concerns with unions. However, from my constituents in Hamilton, I know who was in the forefront of universal health care in Hamilton and Canada. It was the labour movement. I know who was in the forefront of fighting for CPP and who is in the forefront today fighting for CPP for people who do not have pensions, who do not have collective agreements. That is what the labour movement is doing. Who else is standing up for the poor in this country? Who else is standing up for the unemployed? Who else is on the front line of ensuring that we have decent minimum wage protection in this country? What about

environmental protection? If members look at any demonstration, or any submission to a legislative body, they will always find the Canadian labour movement at the forefront of all the things that make this the greatest country in the world.

We are not the greatest country in the world because we have the lowest tax rate or because we have the weakest environmental protection. We are the greatest country in the world for the antithesis of that, which is that we have those protections. These do not just come about by themselves, no matter how good a government is. I will say that about NDP, Liberal, or Conservative governments, because it does not matter. There is only so much that they are going to get done, it will still require the labour movement to be there at the forefront fighting, first of all, for the rights of workers and then spending generations after that fighting to defend those rights.

• (1555)

However, with the last government, we saw an outright attack on the labour movement. It is interesting that the Conservatives were telling the labour movement that the unions forced dues and that their members got tax credits for their dues, therefore the public had the right to all this information. I remember the debate, and that was part of what they talked about.

It is interesting that the Conservatives said that was what they wanted to bring about, but in reality, they led an attack on the labour movement for the reasons I just said. However, interestingly, that same application could be made to the Canadian Medical Association, or the law societies, but the Conservatives did not include them.

It was supposedly about fairness for the average Canadian, the taxpayer. It was supposed to be about transparency and all this was the rightful demand of the public, so the former government said, because of tax implications. People were getting benefits from this. The unions were charging dues and members were allowed to have a tax deduction for those dues. For both of those reasons, the Conservatives said that there should be accountability. However, the legal and medical professions, although they may not call themselves unions, they de facto are. In fact, we have seen doctors go on strike in our country on quite a few occasions.

Therefore, the myth the previous government was putting forward was that this was all about the taxpayer, just like when the previous speaker said it was all about working people. All of that is a camouflage. The fact is that with Bill C-525, the Conservatives brought in the changes for certification.

By the way, I would mention the similarities between former Prime Minister Harper and former Ontario Premier Mike Harris. In addition to starting with the letter “H” and both having six letters, they even had the same chief of staff for a while—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member that he cannot indirectly or directly talk about someone who is elected in the House.

Government Orders

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, you are right. I was assuming the former premier minister had stepped down from this place, but he did not, and I apologize. However, I can say Harris because he is not a member here and never was.

However, if we take a look at the studies that have been done, guess what happened? Fewer unions were organizing and fewer organizing drives were successful. Right now the Conservatives would be saying “yes” that this was the whole idea.

Therefore, we are pleased to stand in repealing this legislation. We would have a bill in front of this place too if we had won the election, because the current legislation is wrong.

Promises were made to the labour movement to give them back their rights, and the government of the day right now is honouring that commitment. We are proud to support the bill and to hold the Liberals to account for the promises they have made. When they do honour them, we will say so. When it is time to give them their due credit, we will do that. This is the right thing to do. It was a promise made, and it is important to get this done and cleaned out of the way.

It is high time we had a government in Canada and a House of Commons that actually saw the labour movement as the positive contribution to our nation that it is, rather than always assuming that when we hear “union” we hear a negative and anti-democratic, which is what the Conservative government tried to say all the time. It is not true. It will never be true. As someone who is a proud product of the Canadian labour movement, I am proud to stand here and list and enunciate the great things the labour movement has done to make Canada the greatest country in the world.

This is the right legislation, and we are pleased and proud to stand and support it.

• (1600)

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as the member would know, when I was a mayor in Hamilton and whenever there was an event where we were all to speak, we all wanted to know the list of speakers because nobody wanted to come after the member across the way because of his remarkable and formidable speech-making ability.

In view of some of the situations that are arising with regard to organized labour, would the member commit to doing his best to work with the government in order to ensure positive results for the working people of Hamilton and the working people of Canada? He could do this as he did in the past in a team Hamilton capacity. Would he commit to trying to work with the government in these terms?

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek for his kind words and I congratulate him on his election to this place. I recognize the hon. member's role. We may have disagreements from time to time on different details of the labour movement, things that are important and the order of things, but any question of the major contribution that the labour movement makes to Canada I know my friend from Hamilton East shares that. I thank him for his voice over the years and for his continuing voice.

On that last point, team Hamilton was started by Mayor Fred Eisenberger. The whole idea of team Hamilton was wherever

possible, MPs and MPPs from all parties would get together, not to fight or to put government members on the spot, to agree on common issues that were in the best interests of home town Hamilton. We would all agree to move forward. In my case, being in opposition, the most I could usually offer was a willingness to shut up and not stand in this place and make a big deal out of something when quietly we were trying to get something done. That can only be done with co-operation, respect, and leadership.

I look forward to continuing that, because I know one thing for sure, and that is that nobody else but a Hamiltonian would get up and ask, “What can I do for Hamilton?” It has to be Hamiltonians. We need to stick together, so I am in.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to pay my respects to my hon. colleague. His style is very strong, and I like that, even if I disagree.

[*Translation*]

I want to remind the member that I was once a union member and I was proud of my union and my union representatives, because they worked hard for the well-being of the workers. The difference is the bosses. My union was affiliated with the FTQ. When I heard about all the misconduct of the FTQ exposed at the Charbonneau commission, I was outraged. That is the point.

[*English*]

How can that gentleman, who has been elected five times under a secret ballot vote, disagree on having a secret ballot to create a union?

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. friend for his compliments. I appreciate that. If that is his style, I look forward to more of this back and forth.

I would remind the member that there are problems in democratic unions just like there are problems in Canada, in our own democracy. We even had an inquiry led by Judge Gomery which looked into people accused of stealing tens of millions of dollars. Did that mean that we said to heck with Canadian democracy and threw it out the window? No. We say we have a problem, but we have systems and checks and balances to take care of that problem and we will do it in an open and transparent way. That is exactly what the labour movement does with those sorts of things. The members are in charge, they pay the freight, and they are the ones calling the shots.

That was what was so obscene about the legislation. It left the impression that unions were full of big union bosses and the goons and the guns and the stealing and all the other nonsense. That was the impression my colleague's party left and it was the impression it wanted to leave. That was the impression the legislation left. It had the desired effect. That secret ballot lessened the number of successes that were there because of intimidation. Anyone who has studied this issue knows that this is a fact. This hiding behind the secret ballot as the only way to do it is not the issue at hand. What matters is fairness and equity, and the workplace is not a fair and equitable place. Different rules are needed for that kind of circumstance.

Government Orders

•(1605)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, this House is quite different than it was in the previous Parliament. For nearly 10 years, a bitter tone pervaded everything that had to do with social justice. Everyone could see it and read it. In contrast, this government's gesture, its repealing of the legislation that came out of Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, is a sign of its openness towards the driving forces of Quebec's economy.

This is what was missing during the previous government's reign. It did not really respect those who are working hard to build our economy, namely, the workers.

We wanted to believe that the vitriolic rhetoric of the Tea Party in the United States was centred around what is known as the deep south and the Republican Party. Unfortunately, the Conservatives proved to us that they were but a northern branch of the Republican Party of the Bushes, Trump, Romney, and other right-wing politicians.

Those are the people my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent is defending so blithely. I remember the day when he brandished his membership card from the old Progressive Conservative Party of Canada in front of the media. He did so proudly, but I think he was mistaken. He did not join the conservative party of former prime minister Brian Mulroney. He joined a party that wears a blue mask to hide its true roots, those of the defunct Canadian Alliance, a party that respects only the rich and powerful of this world and that despises the less fortunate and the working men and women of this country.

Those two bills were false fronts for hatred of social justice, for a desire to reduce workers to tools of production rather than regard them as human beings worthy of respect, for a neo-liberal ideology with the singular political goal of destroying those who would make our society more egalitarian.

Even Senator Segal, a Conservative, condemned those bills. All through those years of anti-union and anti-progressive governance, we saw special bills to force striking workers back to work, military policies that supplanted international politics, and economic policies that gave more money to the rich and took it away from our society's middle class and the poor.

Even though they are no longer in power, the Conservatives continue to cause damage that we will no longer have to bear once our nation becomes independent and free from the threat of their return to power. When they introduced their bills that were harmful to the common good, we listened to them speak about their good intentions to defend workers from the evil unions that represent them.

These same members defended policies that would reduce wages. These same members who claim to be the strongest supporters of pay equity also support policies on temporary workers, economic treaties with countries that support the exploitation of workers, policies on military contracts with countries that have no respect for human rights, especially the rights of women, and economic policies against labour-sponsored funds such as the Fonds de solidarité FTQ.

The time had come to move on to other things and have substantive debates in the House of Commons. I am proud to be a union activist, not because my approach is based on ideology, but because I believe in having a level playing field in our society. It would be a lie to say that we currently have a level playing field. I know that my right-wing colleagues will certainly disagree. That is to be expected.

When we turn ideology and rhetoric into the dogma of governance, we end up forgetting the facts, evidence, and scientific data that should be the driving forces of our actions in government. It is not surprising that the same government that passed its ideological bills also muzzled federal government scientists at the same time. When the data contradict our beliefs, then it is best to prevent people from reading them, right?

I am a unionist because unions are useful in our society. That is something that even old-school Conservatives acknowledge. Unions here are not ideological, they are pragmatic. They adopt constructive approaches. They are able to partner with businesses and employers for the economy and for the common good. Attacking and berating them, which became commonplace under the former government, was mean-spirited and vicious. The previous government was part of the global phenomenon of violating union rights. The rich and powerful of this world want to squeeze the middle class by taking away some of the leverage it needs for success.

•(1610)

It was nothing short of a concerted strategy by the former prime minister and his friends in the financial community to remove workers' last defences. Without our unions, it would certainly be easier for the government to lower the minimum wage, do away with our public health care system, and butcher the welfare state that our parents and unions fought so hard to build in the 1960s and 1970s.

Regardless of what the big guns on the right, such as the Duhaimés and the Donald Trumps of this world, may say, Quebecers and Canadians agreed on some things. The economic ultra-liberalism that contributed to the worldwide poverty of the 1930s was not the way to go in the 21st century.

Once again, I would like to commend the government on the gesture of openness it made by introducing Bill C-4. We are far from the promised land. There are still many inequalities. However, this is a step in the right direction, and it at least shows us the direction that we should take. We have not finished talking about inequalities in the House. There are still far too many.

For nearly 40 years now, workers' purchasing power has been decreasing, while executives' salaries have been increasing. The grand scheme to tear down the welfare state across the western world has been under way for too long.

Whether we are talking about Reagan, Thatcher, whom my colleague from Outremont so admired, Bush, or our former Canadian prime minister, too many politicians deliberately lie to voters. They claim to want what is good for them, yet all the while adopt policies that favour the rich and powerful. As the saying goes, "I want what is good for you and I want your goods as well."

Government Orders

The time has come to reverse the trend. The time has come to think about the group instead of the individual, and that is why we have unions. In unity there is strength, as we know, and unions help bring strength to workers around the world.

Long live Michel Chartrand, Thérèse Casgrain, Marcel Péroin, Lorraine Pagé, and my friend Réjean Parent. Long live all those who fight for social justice.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on her very intelligent and passionate speech.

It is obvious to me that Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 were direct attacks on unions, in the same way that the former government liked to attack environmental groups and indigenous peoples.

Where does the hon. member think this philosophy of always attacking and dividing people came from? What does she think about that?

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Madam Speaker, all the groups fighting for social justice are being attacked all over the world.

This neo-liberal trend has us up against a wall, since there are more and more inequalities, in fact. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer.

• (1615)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, earlier the member mentioned my membership card, which I actually have with me. Unfortunately, the standing orders prevent me from displaying it. However, I definitely have it with me, and I can assure the House that I am very proud of it. Why?

Back in 1981, when I was a member of the Progressive Conservative Party, we believed in democracy, transparency, and accountability, and those exact issues are in play with Bill C-4 because it is an attack on those three pillars of our democratic system.

While those statements were not uninteresting, they were a little too exaggerated. It is an exaggeration to talk about hatred for social justice and the dogma of governance and to say that we cared only for the rich.

Since we are on the subject of history and the Conservatives of the 1980s, may I remind my hon. colleague that her party was founded by the hon. Lucien Bouchard? Does she remember that in 1982 and 1983, he was the chief negotiator for the government that took a very hard line against unions? That is a useful reminder.

Here is my question: how can a member of Parliament oppose secret ballot voting? Does my colleague disagree with Robyn Benson, who said:

PSAC has no issue with voting by secret ballot. We do it regularly to elect our officers, ratify collective agreements, and vote for strike action.

Robyn Benson is a member of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. She is not a big, bad Conservative. She is a union leader.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Madam Speaker, regarding the history lesson, I want to reassure my colleague that as a teacher, I am very familiar with the events of 1982-83.

To answer his question on secret ballots, I want to point out what happened in the United States, where similar legislation was passed and the rate of unionization dropped from about 30% to 11% in less than 30 years. That is what happens with secret ballots. The Conservative Party's decision to bring in secret ballots has nothing to do with democracy. It is an attack on the union movement.

[*English*]

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Madam Speaker, it was estimated that Bill C-377 would cost the Canada Revenue Agency approximately \$21 million to establish the electronic database over the first two years and approximately \$2.1 million per year for subsequent years. Our cost estimates were much higher on the cost of implementing these new requirements, not to mention the astronomical number of hours that would be wasted by each labour organization in order to comply with these regulations.

The member mentioned that she was a former union member. We all know that money from many labour organizations goes into our communities to fund wonderful things that fill in the gaps where money does not exist from the government or other levels. Could the member please highlight some of the differences that union contributions have made in her community?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Madam Speaker, I cannot thank the member enough for raising this issue.

I was a member of a union of teachers and educational support staff. In 1989, we established a network to protect the environment and help create environmentally friendly schools that worked on ecology, pacifism and solidarity. That is an example of what unions do.

Also, in unionized companies affiliated with the FTQ, committees promoting French are created to help workers. My colleague is quite correct. Unions promote greater respect for workers and greater social justice.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Drummond, Official Languages; the hon. member for Jonquière, Human Trafficking.

[*English*]

Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Madam Speaker, there has been a lot of talk about support for unions and so forth. I grew up in a union town, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. My dad was a union executive, and I was very proud of him, and I was a union member myself. I find it rather offensive that just because I am a Conservative and particularly a fiscal Conservative that somehow I am anti-union or we are all anti-union. We have to realize that is just a red herring.

Government Orders

I am pleased to rise in this House today to stand up for good hard-working Canadians, including union members, and speak against Bill C-4. I believe, as do my Conservative colleagues, that transparency and accountability are the pillars of our policies. In fact, it was our former Conservative government that created the Federal Accountability Act, and we did not stop there. As well, we created and passed legislation to ensure unions were accountable to their members and to all Canadians. Bill C-4 would threaten accountability and transparency in labour negotiations and labour relations. All Canadians should know where their money goes and be entitled to accountability.

The member for Kildonan—St. Paul told the House the legislation reflects the Liberal government's "commitment to restore a fair and balanced approach to labour relations in this country". However, in fact this bill would remove the balance struck between big union bosses and Canadians. Bill C-4 perhaps would better reflect the uncomfortably close relationship between the Liberal government and union bosses.

I would like to review the content of both bills that would be repealed by Bill C-4.

We are looking at Bill C-525. Bill C-525 addressed the concerns the union members themselves had with the previous card check system. The card check system allows for a workplace to be unionized without allowing all employees to express their opinion. In fact, the unionization of a workplace could occur without a significant proportion of the bargaining unit having been made aware. That is just wrong. In the current system, if a certification drive were to be conducted for a bargaining unit of 100 employers and the union were able to obtain the signatures of 51 members, the bargaining unit would be certified. There is not a requirement for the remaining 49% of members to be notified that a unionization drive is even taking place or to be given the opportunity to express their opinions or opposition. That is just wrong. The card check system is susceptible to abuse wherein workers could be pressured by unions and/or their colleagues into signing a union card. A secret ballot vote allows employees to provide an honest and accurate indication of support, free from the threat of pressure or intimidation from both unions and employers.

Now let us look at Bill C-377. It also took steps to improve transparency with union funds. Previously, labour organizations that enjoyed substantial public benefits were not required to publicly disclose their financial activity. Labour organizations operate tax-free, and their members receive full income tax deductibility for their dues and payments, and receive their strike pay tax-free. Dues deductibility alone costs the federal treasury in the range of half a billion dollars a year. That is a staggering amount of money. Financial transparency occurs in institutions receiving substantial public benefit. This is not a new concept. Bill C-377 addressed this gap in financial accountability, extending transparency to unions. In short, the bill required that every labour organization in Canada file a standard set of financials each year, which are posted on the CRA website, much like Canadian charities already do. It was not radical legislation.

● (1620)

It is a fact. Canadians, union members, stakeholders, and at least members on this side of the House, support transparency and accountability.

Let me share some of the widespread support that these bills have received.

With regard to Bill C-525, in a news release from April 2014, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business welcomed its passage, stating, "secret ballot votes are a cornerstone of our democracy". I think virtually anybody in Canada has to agree with that statement.

A poll commissioned by the Canadian LabourWatch Association found that 86% of unionized or formerly unionized workers supported secret ballot voting for union accreditation. Canada is the only country in the industrialized world that forces union dues upon workers.

Further, in his testimony before the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, John Mortimer, president of the Canadian LabourWatch Association, expressed support for Bill C-525, making the following points:

Since 1977, six provinces, including Nova Scotia, British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, have established laws guaranteeing secret ballots for union certification. The secret ballot is statutorily guaranteed for the majority of Canadians. This type of secret ballot has not caused unions to disappear, not even in Nova Scotia, where it has been in place since 1977. The rate of new unionizations is lower than before and reflects what informed employees are making as a private choice. That is what they want.

Sometimes employees are victims of inappropriate tactics and given wrong information to get them to sign a membership card. That is just wrong. For example, we know that some employees sign their card without knowing the true result, which is the unionization of their workplace. With regard to timelines for holding secret ballots, seven Canadian jurisdictions do not set timelines for votes.

Now, Bill C-377 also received significant support. I will highlight a few of them.

During his testimony before the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, in 2015, Aaron Wudrick, federal director, indicated that the Canadian Taxpayers Federation supported the bill for the following reasons. He said that given that unions enjoy a wide range of tax benefits and special tax treatment, it would be appropriate to require them to disclose their financial information, as is the case with charities.

It is a no-brainer. Transparency is very important because it acts as a deterrent and allows a broader class of people to uncover any transgressions.

Government Orders

In testimony before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance and the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Trade and Commerce, Terrance Oakey, president of Merit Canada, was in favour of Bill C-377. He said that the bill would enable Canada to catch up with other advanced economies when it comes to financial disclosure. That has to be a good thing.

The bill would not change the mandatory payment of dues by unionized workers, nor the manner in which that money is used. The bill only deals with the transparency requirements that should be imposed on labour organizations. Workers paying dues deserve to know how that money will be spent—it is the least that should happen—and Canadians have a right to know how their taxes are being used to influence public policy.

A 2011 poll by Nanos found that 86% of unionized Canadians supported greater union transparency. That is an opinion shared by 83% of the general public.

With this support, why does the Liberal government want to repeal these important pieces of legislation? I must ask the government where the fairness is for hard-working Canadians. It is just wrong-headed, and we cannot stand for this.

• (1625)

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened at some length to the member's rationale for why he opposes the government's initiatives with respect to Bill C-4, and I will reference specific comments that he made with respect to Bill C-377. In the previous Parliament, the first time that the matter was referred to the Senate, the bill was amended significantly by the Senate Tory majority, which seemed to have been opposed by the member's government at that time.

Does my friend have a comment as to why, at a time when Conservatives could not get support from their own Senate Tory colleagues, they felt the need to gut the attempts made by that caucus to make improvements to the bill?

• (1630)

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Madam Speaker, I have to confess, as my colleague probably knows, that I was not around for that.

It comes down to transparency. It is a no-brainer. It was good legislation. Union members supported it. It is not all about union leaders. Union members are quite often not informed by their own leadership, so we have to stand up for hard-working union members. We are not here to support the union bosses; we are here to support the hard-working union members.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Conservatives cannot simply claim to be in favour of transparency and equity, even if every Conservative member tells me that he or she supports workers and unions. In my opinion, when a government interferes in an organization's business and tries to pit its members and leaders against each other, that government cannot then turn around and say that it wants to help the organization. The truth is that the useless bill that the Conservatives introduced was designed to give unfair advantage to anti-union employers. That is what it boils down to.

[*English*]

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Madam Speaker, I am not sure that there is a question there.

I have to reiterate that this bill is all about fairness. The member talked about organizations' leaders, and that seems to be what that party talks about. It gets its campaign workers and others from major union bosses and so forth. As Canadians, as Conservatives, and as someone who is a fiscal conservative, we care about the average worker.

Sometimes the party that appears to have tight focus with others in the labour movement throws the average worker under the bus. This is an exact example of it. Union members, the rank and file, want more transparency, and they certainly want secret ballots because the intimidation factor is too strong. I have seen it first-hand. People are afraid. I have heard members from the other side ask how many cases have come up where they are not complaining. They are afraid to complain.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is my first opportunity to get the floor in this debate, but not for lack of trying.

I recognize that the hon. member for Edmonton Griesbach is new to this place, but the debates around Bill C-377 were very clear. It was not just union leadership; it was union membership. It was a disguised attempt to tie the hands of fair collective bargaining.

Public release of information like union financing prejudices unions going in to collective bargaining, potentially on the verge of strikes.

This was anti-union legislation. I urge newly elected Conservatives to reconsider.

• (1635)

Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Madam Speaker, I obviously disagree. It is absolutely the right thing to do. Our legislation in the past was good, and of course I support the past legislation.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today following my good friend from Edmonton Griesbach who talked about his own personal experience with his family and as a former union member himself. I hope to contribute to the debate here on Bill C-4 today, dispel some of the myths brought to this place by some of my colleagues in government, and talk in depth about the two reforms that Bill C-4 essentially would dismantle, what I would call the modernization of the labour movement from the last Parliament that is being dismantled in Bill C-4.

Government Orders

However first, I am concerned when members of this place suggest that those measures being unwound in Bill C-4 are a tax on union members or a tax on the labour movement. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have heard statistics from polls that have shown that union members support the measures contained in both Bill C-525 and Bill C-377 from the last Parliament. In many ways, the labour movement is the last large portion of our society to embrace the modern concepts of transparency that are really commonplace throughout government of all levels and throughout the charitable sector. It is sad that it takes Parliament to pull the movement into this modern age of transparency and disclosure, but it was something that was supported by union members.

There is no dismantling of rights. There is no attack, and I am going to spend a few moments to talk about what those bills contain and why it is a bad public policy move to step away from these modernization efforts for the labour movement. However, more importantly, why it is not an attack is that I, like many of my colleagues, was elected to Parliament in 2012 and in the last general election by members of unions, to a large extent.

I am very proud to have some of my best door-knockers who are either former or current members of the CAW, now Unifor, working in our auto industry at General Motors in Oshawa. I am very proud to have the strong support of members of the Power Workers' Union, working both at the Darlington generating station in my riding and at the Pickering station nearby. When I ran for office I spoke to Don MacKinnon, the head of that union, who has been a very good advocate for clean and reliable nuclear energy. I rely on the expertise that a lot of leading figures in the labour movement bring to their sectors. I consulted those same members on our trade agreements when I was parliamentary secretary for international trade in the last Parliament. I am very proud to represent these people who do get benefits from belonging to their union.

We have heard many speeches about how, over the last century, the union movement has been helpful and has advocated public policy and so on. Nothing in the two bills from the last Parliament took any of that away. It is really cowardice of debate when people have to hide the real actions of Bill C-4 behind saying unions brought us health care and unions brought us weekends. Let us talk about what was in those bills from the previous Parliament and what Bill C-4 is attempting to do. Let us not wrap it up in the trappings of unions having made a large and profound impact on our society. They have, and none of these moves were right-to-work movements or banishing unions. This was about making sure of the movement, which is supported through tax exemption status, which is supported by the Rand formula, meaning dues are paid under compulsion much like taxes are. We cannot pick or choose whether we pay this out of our paycheque. That fact means that the movement needs to embrace these concepts themselves, and it is disappointing that it did not.

For people who have been following this debate at home, Bill C-4 is essentially the new Liberal government's attempt at unwinding two very modest reforms from the previous Parliament. The first is Bill C-525, which was a bill that brought essentially the secret ballot to union certification.

● (1640)

It is interesting that the secret ballot has been the underpinning of our parliamentary electoral process since it was brought in by the Liberal government of Prime Minister Mackenzie in 1874. I think it is now considered a fundamental element of elections in Canada, where there is a secret ballot so that people can place their *X* in a way they determine is best without fear of somebody watching, and without fear of repercussions.

It is essentially a basic tenet of our parliamentary democracy in Canada, yet it is somehow absurd to extend that same protection of a secret ballot to the certification vote, to truly vote how one feels is best for one's personal view. I guess by saying that it should not be there, does it mean the certification vote is somehow outside of normal tenets of democracy? That is all I can determine from some of the comments here, such as rights being taken away and attacks on the union movement.

People in Canada need to know that Bill C-525 was for the secret ballot. I am sure a lot of Canadians who do not belong to a union are probably surprised that there was no secret ballot before. This is what we are talking about.

I have heard some members say there would be intimidation by employers and that sort of thing. That is nonsense. The secret ballot is inherently secret. There is no employer there watching the vote, and the votes will not be named. Therefore, one can exercise one's democratic right to cast a ballot the way one sees fit for one's own personal views and the way one sees fit for the future of one's workforce, whether to stay in the form of a non-unionized environment or to unionize.

Really, unions should be embracing the concept of having a full and robust democratic measure as part of their originating entrance into a workplace. Why would they shy away from a secret ballot? It is a fundamental pillar for all levels of government, and the labour movement should endorse that.

Second, Bill C-4 would unwind Bill C-377, from the last Parliament. We have heard a lot of people getting very heated about that subject as well. It is similarly disappointing that such legislation had to be brought forward and that the labour movement would not itself embrace this concept.

Yet again, another Liberal government, in fact the father of the current Prime Minister, brought in access to information legislation in 1983. In subsequent years, all provincial levels of government and virtually all major municipalities have embraced this same concept of whether there would be transparency. If one pays one's taxes by compulsion, one should be able to know where that money goes and assess whether it is being well spent.

This same basic tenet extends to the charitable sector as well, which through the CRA and through its tax assistance for charitable donations, has similar responsibilities on disclosure, to allow Canadians to assess where that money was being spent. Therefore, why should one part of our society, in this case the union movement, be exempt from a generational move towards transparency?

Government Orders

Quite frankly, I do not understand it. With a \$5,000 threshold, CRA and the Government of Canada are not looking into an organization's children's Christmas party. However, if an organization is backing a major political campaign, like the Working Families in Ontario, or sending delegates to a large convention overseas that is taking positions that would be adverse to Canadian principles, they should be able to see where that money is being spent, because the government has allowed that money to be spent on a tax-exempt basis.

Therefore, for politicians at all levels and the charitable sector, Canadians know that transparency is commonplace now. The new government mentions it on occasion. This same level of transparency has been in effect in the United States, in the brother and sister unions, since the Kennedy administration.

Therefore, with Bill C-4, two fundamental reforms that would be good for the labour movement would be withdrawn. It concerns this side of the House. Hopefully it should concern more and more Canadians.

• (1645)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Intergovernmental Affairs), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened to the member's comments, and I am a little troubled.

There are political parties that stand for small government. We hear parties talk about the reach they want into every single civil institution, whether it is a first nations band or a labour union. Next they will be deciding whether or not the members of the church we send across to Rome to elect the pope should have to publicly declare how they are voting and spending their dollars.

How far a reach would that party deem to be justified? Would it be reaching into every self-organized, democratic body in this country, deciding that it will make the decision on what is good for them, that it will assess the dollars spent as to whether it is in keeping with Canadian principle? How far a reach does this party contemplate? How many democratic institutions does it want to run besides itself in this Parliament?

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Madam Speaker, that is a very good question that my friend asked.

The question is simple. Any organization that the Government of Canada has given tax-exempt status to or requires Canadians to pay, by compulsion, dues or taxes or levies should know, at a fundamental level, and be able to see how that money is spent.

To bring it home to the hon. member, I am sitting in this Parliament a few years earlier than I intended in large part because the previous MP had some issues with spending disclosures. Orange juice or other things were not disclosed.

This is the era of transparency, which that side uses as a term, from time to time, but in its first 100 days would remove that same basic transparency, in Bill C-4, from the labour movement and from first nations governments. It is a step backwards.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Madam Speaker, what I have often wondered about this is why now. With all the things that are going on in Canada, why bring this legislation forward now?

I look at things, and I go back to Saskatchewan, and what is important to us is jobs, of course, and the economy. I look across eastern Canada and at the manufacturing sector and how there is a lack of performance in jobs and exports in that sector, and how it is not competitive here in Ontario because of provincial rules.

Can the member explain to me why the Liberal Party felt it was necessary, to take as its first action here in the House of Commons, in its first 100 days, to repeal this legislation? Can he give us some insight on what he thinks is the reason behind that?

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Madam Speaker, the member always has very insightful questions in this House.

I cannot put myself in the shoes of the new government, and I certainly would not want to be in those shoes. However, if we look at the first 100 days—and there is a snazzy video out on the first 100 days—we can see the legislative agenda.

Bill C-1 is a formulaic administration-of-oaths bill; Bill C-2 was tax increases and the elimination of the TFSA; Bill C-3 was a massive injection of spending, in large part to cover a promise on the Syrian refugee resettlement; Bill C-4 is the unwinding of labour modernization from the previous Parliament, clearly a quid pro quo for support during the election; and Bill C-5 is undoing the sick day negotiation with the public service.

If we look at the legislative agenda of the new government in the first 100 days, it is tax, spend, and support the friends who got them into office. Contrast that with the previous government's first 100 days. There was the Federal Accountability Act, child care benefits for all families, and a GST reduction. It was about giving back to Canadians, not taking away.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am glad to have the opportunity to rise in the House today on behalf of the many union members who live in my great riding of Kitchener—Conestoga. My riding is home to many union members. In fact, many of my good friends and family are union members.

The Liberal Party would have Canadians believe that the Conservative Party of Canada is anti-union. That is ludicrous. We on this side of the House are pro-worker, pro-accountability, and pro-transparency. Bill C-525 and Bill C-377, introduced by the previous government, made much headway in increasing both union member and non-union member confidence in unions.

Government Orders

One of the things I found troubling earlier this morning was my colleagues' statements on the opposite side of the House that the introduction of our legislation as two private members' bills was a back-door method of legislation. On this side of the House, we value all our members in the House, backbenchers and front benchers. Our government's record on private member's bills is better than any previous government's. The two private member's pieces of legislation that I was privileged to introduce were debated in the House and then passed into law. I will forever be grateful that as a private member I had the opportunity to introduce those bills and to see the support for them in the House and to know that they are now part of our government's legislation.

As a brief summary of the legislation the Liberal government is planning to repeal via Bill C-4, Bill C-525, the Employees' Voting Rights Act, was introduced by my hard-working colleague, the member for Red Deer—Lacombe. The legislation made it mandatory that a secret ballot be conducted for the accreditation or revocation of a trade union, rather than the automatic certification of a union when a majority of employees, 50% plus one, sign their membership card. The legislation strikes a balance by creating the same process when it comes to unionizing a workplace and to revoking a union according to the employee wishes. The decision of whether to unionize rests with the employees, not with the union and not with the employer.

I would like to pose a few questions to my colleagues across the floor. First, why is the Liberal government so against secret ballot voting? We know that the Public Service Alliance of Canada, or PSAC, stated at the committee charged with studying Bill C-525 that it uses secret ballot votes for internal elections and for the ratification of settlement agreements from collective bargaining. The president of PSAC, Robyn Benson had this to say:

Contrary to what you may have heard, PSAC has no issue with voting by secret ballot. We do it regularly to elect our officers, ratify collective agreements, and vote for strike action, as examples.

Furthermore, when asked if she believed that if there were to be a secret ballot vote, it should be 50% plus one of all employees, not just those present, her answer was yes, that she agreed.

Every member in the House was elected by a secret ballot vote, and on election day as nominees we are not allowed to stand beside the voting booth to tell voters to cast a ballot in our favour. I believe the hard-working men and women, my friends, union members from Kitchener-Conestoga, deserve the same privilege that we give to all constituents in our riding on federal election day, a free and secret vote. Without this commitment, employees who have not signed their membership card may not even be aware that a union certification drive is in process, and they may not be in favour of that union or its representatives.

One question that arises is whether it is even fair for them not to be consulted, since they must pay union dues and be members of the union. Another question is whether employees had signed their union card free of intimidation.

It is clear to me that allowing secret ballot voting is very common sense. However, do not just take my word for it. Here are a few others who support this legislation. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business clearly pointed out that “As secret ballot votes

are a cornerstone of our democracy, if the process is good enough to elect our politicians, it should be good enough to form a union.”

Everyone in the House knows how important small and medium-sized business is to the engine of the economy of Canada, and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business speaks very clearly on behalf of the workers in those businesses.

• (1650)

The Federally Regulated Employers—Transportation and Communications group testified that it and its members also support Bill C-525.

John Mortimer, the president of the Canadian LabourWatch Association, expressed his support on behalf of his organization for Bill C-525 for many reasons, including the fact that sometimes employees are victims of inappropriate tactics and are given the wrong information so that they will sign their membership card. For example, some employees sign their card without knowing the true result, which is the unionization of their workplace.

The Canadian LabourWatch Association also commissioned a poll of unionized and formerly unionized workers, which was very helpful. It found that 86% support secret ballot voting for union accreditation.

I could go on. However, let me just quote Merit Canada. It pointed out that the old system under which employees expressed support for its union's certification by signing their membership card resulted in intimidation and manipulation by both union organizers and management.

I hope that my colleagues from the Liberal Party do not support the manipulation and intimidation of hard-working Canadians.

Bill C-525's asking for a secret ballot is just plain common sense and the very cornerstone of modern democracy, as has been pointed out many times today.

Moving now to Bill C-377, what is the Liberal government trying to accomplish by giving a free pass to unions with respect to its financial transparency?

Bill C-377, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (requirements for labour organizations), introduced by my former colleague the previous member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, would extend the principle of public disclosure to a group of institutions that enjoy substantial public benefits, in other words, labour organizations. The basic premise of the bill is that every labour organization in Canada will file a standard set of financials each year, which will then be posted on the CRA website, much like Canadian charities already do.

These bills are common sense and, as members will hear during the remainder of my remarks, are what Canadians want. I do not understand why the current Liberal government has decided to repeal these laws that increase confidence in and the integrity of our unions as one of its first acts in this Parliament.

While I think this is common sense, let us also hear from others.

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In a Leger survey conducted in 2013, consisting of 1,400 respondents, not only did 83% of Canadians surveyed indicate they wanted public disclosure but 84% of current union members surveyed also said they wanted public disclosure.

Furthermore, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation supported this piece of legislation. It said that similar legislation has been in place for charities for many years and that there ought to be treatment of labour organizations analogous to that of charities.

The Quebec Employers Council also welcomed Bill C-377, citing that it is appropriate to make public the amount of dues that workers are required to pay, and which involve significant tax advantages, as well as the manner in which they are used.

This bill is actually about public disclosure, and this is a very positive step forward for unions and Canadian workers. Public disclosure will demonstrate that labour organizations spend their money wisely, effectively, and obtain good value for members' dues. This bill does not tell unions how to spend their money or restrict them in any way.

In my province of Ontario we have what we call the “sunshine list”, which makes public a list of all publicly funded employees who make over \$100,000. In addition, salaries, benefits and office expenses of members of Parliament, MLAs, and others are also easy to obtain online.

Because union directors are also publicly funded through the mandatory union dues of all of their members, it only makes sense that union leaders in positions of authority and employees of the union earning more than \$100,000 will have to disclose their earnings.

It is also important to recognize that the salaries of many Canadian union leaders are already published online in the United States. The U.S. has had legislation requiring public disclosure since 1959, before many of my colleagues in the House were even born. The Liberals would have us travel back in time and limit this form of accountability.

The actions that Bill C-4 is bringing into effect would not increase the confidence that Canadians have in our unions and our leadership, and it is important that we oppose the bill at every opportunity.

• (1655)

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the hon. member was the third opposition member who stated that grassroots union members absolutely support the two bills in question, when my experience has been the complete opposite.

The previous two bills, Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, I understand, were extremely unpopular across the country. I can speak first-hand for Saint Boniface—Saint Vital that they were extremely unpopular.

On October 19, Canadians spoke. Notwithstanding the will of Canadians on October 19, my question for the hon. member is more specific than that.

There are seven provinces that have voiced their opposition to Bill C-377 because it basically duplicates work they already do at the provincial level. I am wondering if the hon. member would comment

on a bill that duplicates what many provinces are already doing, with several of them speaking out against the bill.

• (1700)

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Madam Speaker, again I think this question points out some of the differences between our parties' perspective on unions.

We certainly appreciate what unions do, we appreciate union workers, and we want to listen to the union members. That is why I quoted some anecdotal evidence that members in my riding say this or say that. However, the Leger poll of some 1,400 respondents—a very large sample—that I referred to in my comments clearly indicated that 84% of the current union members surveyed said they wanted public disclosure.

The Liberal Party often talks about scientific evidence and evidence-based decision-making. Here we have the evidence. It is important that we on this side continue to work on behalf of the union members, not simply the union leaders who do not want this kind of disclosure and who do not want secret ballot voting.

Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Kitchener—Conestoga for his contributions to today's debate. I found the history somewhat revisionist and I want to understand what he thinks.

He likes to say that private members' bills are a good way of doing public policy and are great for democracy. How many of these private members' bills, including Bill C-525, were totally in line with the ideology of the government of the day?

We all know that this private member's bill got through because the former PMO wanted it to get through. The Senate did not want it to get through, but the former PMO wanted it to get through.

It is a bit rich to say that these independent private members' bills somehow float out there and become law because that is how democracy works in the House. We all know that it became law because the former PMO wanted it to become law. How do you reconcile that with your position?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I will not reconcile it, but I would remind the member to address the Speaker as opposed to the member in the House.

The hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Madam Speaker, I might just say parenthetically that the hon. member for Newmarket—Aurora has some very big shoes to fill, replacing the member who represented that area for the last number of years. I certainly had the privilege and honour of working with her.

This again comes to the heart of the differences between our parties. On this side of the House, not only do private members have the freedom to craft a piece of private member's legislation and try to gain support on all sides of the House, but at the end of the process they also have the freedom to vote their conscience on this private member's legislation.

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I would challenge my counterparts on the other side. I would request that they ask their leadership for the same privilege that this party has had for all the years I have been here in Parliament and to have a free vote on this private member's legislation and to actually see some work that is initiated from the grassroots in the ridings we represent, come to Parliament, bring it to the discussion and then bring it to fruition in a piece of legislation that is implemented into law.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am proud to rise in this House and speak to this important bill. As somebody from northern Manitoba, I am proud to come from a union town, Thompson, a proud mining town where we all know clearly how important it is to have a strong group of unions in our community. I am also proud of the role that unionized work has played in my family. My dad was a member of the important union in our community, the steelworkers, as was my grandmother. I know what it means to grow up in a household where union work means families and communities being better off.

I am also proud to rise in this House as a New Democrat. The NDP of course is a party that was born out of a labour movement, and it has always stood up for unions and the rights of Canadian workers. We have proudly voiced our fervent opposition to the former Conservative government's attempt to restrict the power of unions and to make it more difficult for workers to organize.

Unions have been a key player in the fight against inequality in our country, and they have been essential stakeholders in pressuring the government into implementing key policy changes that have benefited our entire society. From workplace safety regulations to the weekend, we must not forget the good that has come from the victories of the labour movement.

It is the labour movement, especially in a world where the middle class and the working class are shrinking in size and influence, that is a necessary counterweight to the corporate greed that has been disproportionately rising in power over the last three decades. Therefore, it will come as no surprise that I rise in this House along with my colleagues to express our support for Bill C-4, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act. We welcome the actions taken by the government and will continue to fight for the rights of working people who were undermined by the previous government for so long.

Bill C-4 would repeal two pieces of legislation, Bills C-377 and C-525, that were pushed through by the Conservative government in the last Parliament. These two anti-union bills were designed to make it harder for Canadians to join unions in the federal sector as well as to fundamentally weaken the power of unions by forcing redundant and unreasonable financial reporting. Both bills have been met with widespread opposition and criticism from many groups, including constitutional and privacy experts, the provinces, Conservative and Liberal senators, Canada's Privacy Commissioner, the Canadian Bar Association, and, of course, hard-working union members and workers across the country.

Bill C-377 forced unions to file information on the Internet about the salaries of their members as well as the unions' labour and political relations and activities. This bill was put forth by the

Conservatives under the guise of increased transparency, they said. However, it is crucial to note the fact that unions are already required to make their financial information available to all their members. Furthermore, the NDP as well as the Privacy Commissioner of Canada believe that the bill goes against the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It violates the right of freedom of association and the private lives of all who are members of a union. In addition, Bill C-377 would cost Canadian taxpayers an estimated \$21 million just to establish an electronic database needed to store this information about union members, and it would cost the Canadian public \$2.1 million each year after that. By repealing this piece of legislation, it goes without saying that both the Government of Canada as well as unions themselves would be able to save millions of dollars annually.

Bill C-525 proposed to drastically change the process through which unions under federal jurisdiction become certified. The bill increased the number of membership cards needed to certify a union and eliminated the possibility of forming a union through a majority card check. Prior to this legislation, a union was automatically certified if more than 50% of its employees signed a card indicating that they wanted to be part of a union. However, Bill C-525 outlawed this process. Because of this, the bill makes it harder for workers to unionize while making it easier for unions to be decertified. As such, Bill C-525 leaves workers vulnerable to intimidation by employers or third party members.

Yes, Bill C-4 would be a step in the right direction, but there is still much work to be done to ensure the rights of workers and improve working conditions for all Canadians.

• (1705)

Now I want to acknowledge the fundamental role that unions play in Canadian society through the protection of Canadian workers, the promotion of health and safety in our workplaces, and the role they play as the collective democratic voice for working people. I want to stress the fundamental importance of unions in providing education about workers' rights and standing up against workplace bullying and harassment.

Unions have been trailblazers when it comes to ending all forms of discrimination. They have been at the forefront of fighting for women's rights, LGBTQ rights, and the rights of racialized and indigenous peoples. They contribute to democracy by giving workers collective bargaining power, thereby lowering inequality in our country.

Furthermore, a new study done by the International Monetary Fund, perhaps an unusual source for such information, indicates how increases in income inequality can be directly linked to the decline of rates of unionization. This is particularly shocking considering the IMF has actually contributed to decreased levels of unionization itself.

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Moreover, a decline in unionization correlates to weaker employment laws, leaving workers vulnerable in terms of their rights and more open to exploitation. Unionization helps to equalize the distribution of wages. Higher wages negotiated by unions inject an additional \$786 million into the Canadian economy each year. On average, the hourly wage of a unionized worker is \$5 higher than that of a non-unionized worker. For women, that difference goes up to \$6.65 an hour. Because of this, it is paramount that the importance of unions be recognized and respected accordingly.

As previously expressed, Bill C-4 is a good first step, but New Democrats are disappointed that some major actions are missing from this bill. The NDP will continue to push the government to restore good faith bargaining with public service workers, starting the repeal of division 20 of the Conservative omnibus budget bill, Bill C-59, that attacks a worker's right to sick days.

Furthermore, New Democrats call upon the government to reinstate a federal minimum wage and to adopt anti-scab and proactive pay equity legislation immediately. The NDP will also push the government to repeal former Bill C-4 rather than just review it. This contentious legislation has been called unconstitutional, as pointed out by many, and is said to stack the deck in the government's favour by undermining fair collective bargaining.

I wish to thank all the workers, union members, labour activists, and advocates who made the repeal of these pieces of anti-union legislation possible. As a member of Parliament for the NDP, as well as the critic for jobs, employment and workplace development, it is important for me to show solidarity for our union brothers and sisters.

• (1710)

[Translation]

All those who believe that unionization is outdated need only look at how productivity gains have been divided between labour and capital over the past 30 years or so. Nowadays, capital compensation is completely out of proportion with performance, compared to the low pay labour receives. Speculation is valued more than the production of goods and services. This trend has increased in proportion with the decrease in the rate of unionization in society.

As I reiterate my support for this bill, I would like to send a clear message to the government. The structural problems that the middle class and workers in Canada are facing go beyond the scope of this bill. The fight against inequality requires a structural review of government operations, and the country is counting on the new government to do just that.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first and foremost, Liberals acknowledge the efforts not only of today and in the past, but also no doubt into the future, that the labour movement has made for all sorts of good reasons, from many social programs to rates of pay that exist today, and so forth.

It intrigued me when the member made reference to anti-scab legislation. I can remember the debates in the late 1980s, because I was in the Manitoba legislature. On one occasion, the premier,

Howard Pawley, told the union community that instead of anti-scab legislation, there would be final offer selection. This is something the member's father spoke a great deal about in the Manitoba legislature. Does the member not believe that it is important that we work with labour and business, so that when legislation is developed, it is done on a consultative basis and we should not preclude or prejudice what others might actually want?

Final offer selection at the time served a great purpose and Liberals want to keep options open. Would she not agree?

• (1715)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I stand here as a member of a party that does believe that anti-scab legislation works, and there are models to prove that. It works for workers and it works for communities. It also works for industry in being able to avoid the conflict and tension that comes from labour disputes all too often.

As I mentioned earlier in my speech, Bill C-4 as put forward by the government is a good first step but there is a lot more that we would like to see the government do, including the repeal of division 20 of the Conservative omnibus budget bill that attacks workers' rights to sick days, including implementing proactive pay equity legislation immediately, and looking at the need to implement anti-scab legislation.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to ask my NDP colleague about a specific point.

We keep hearing the Liberals talk about backdoor bills, bills introduced by MPs who are not ministers. In that regard, I want to pay tribute to my predecessor, Alexandrine Latendresse. A few years ago, she introduced a private member's bill in the House and it passed, proving how effective this tool can be and how important it is to allow members to introduce bills even though they are not ministers.

I would like to ask my NDP colleague whether she is in favour of allowing MPs to introduce bills and whether she agrees that we should not consider those MPs as backdoor MPs.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

I have been in the House for seven years now. Although I appreciate the hon. member's example, unfortunately the previous Conservative government repeatedly demonstrated anti-democratic behaviour in the House. We hope to start a new chapter.

The debate today is based on the need to respect and support democracy in the union environment, instead of imposing an ideology that goes against workers and unionism. We must respect workers' rights. That is why we support this bill today.

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[English]

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I really want to follow up on the point that was raised by my friend in his previous question with respect to the whole concept of private members' legislation. I simply want to state our objection. The issue is not about the right of members to bring forward legislation. The question at the end of the day is the fulsomeness of actual participation by all affected groups in these private members' bills.

Does the member have a particular comment with respect to whether labour had an adequate opportunity to participate fully in those two pieces of private members' legislation that we are attempting to repeal today?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, a quick answer is absolutely not. Labour did not get the opportunity to explain or speak in the fullest of terms in opposition to these bills.

I do want to bring the debate back to the important opportunity we have here today to start anew and remove these two bad bills, but let us go further. That is why the NDP message today is that this is an important first step but let us keep going to protect the rights of working people in our country.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to be here. For the people who are watching from home, it is a bad day in Ottawa outside of this place. The snow is falling and they are predicting over a foot of snow here. Traffic has come to a halt almost, yet it is warm in here.

We are discussing Bill C-4, and it is always a pleasure when we can stand and debate the issues.

It is kind of a bad day in here as well for the governing party. One of the first things the Liberals did was take away the First Nations Financial Transparency Act. The second thing they did was pull our troops out of the war against ISIL. Now they have Bill C-4.

The majority of people in my riding of Battle River—Crowfoot would oppose Bill C-4.

Bill C-4 is an act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act. As we have already heard today, the previous Conservative government already passed amendments to the Labour Code and these three statutes.

The amendments improved two key laws on democracy and union transparency. Bill C-377 provided more accountability for union leaders. Bill C-525 required the holding of a secret ballot for the creation or abolition of trade unions. Now the Liberal government is saying, who needs secret ballots?

What about accountability? The Liberals have never liked accountability. That is why it was up to the Conservative Party to move the Federal Accountability Act as our first measure when we formed government.

As a government, we stood up on behalf of union workers. I remember the day the member brought this forward as a private member's bill. He came around and spoke to us. He talked about the union workers who had said they were having difficulty getting that

type of accountability or knowing where their money was being spent.

Everyone knows that some Canadian workers are forced to pay union dues. Until the previous government took action, union bosses, those people who are in charge of the management of a union, did not consult the workers about decisions they had made on behalf of them. Union bosses were not held accountable for their management of the union dues they collected. There was a lack of transparency and accountability when it came to the actions involving where those dollars were to be spent.

There were no rules or regulations that said that the leadership was under any obligation to open the books so union members could see for themselves the various ways that the union leaders were spending union dues. Canadians could not see how much money was raised by any given union. Canadians could not see how any given union was spending its money. It was one big secret.

Sometimes the secrecy extended to union members themselves. They could not see the books of their own union. Some unions would allow members to see the books at a union meeting. Sometimes one had to ask to see the books of one's own union. Imagine anyone doing that. In all honesty, imagine a worker risking being blackballed by the union. The union could very well ask members why they wanted to see that, what they wanted, and what they were looking for. It could ask if there was there something that was bothering them or ask why they needed the information because nobody else had asked for it. Now all of a sudden the union member is the one who is almost guilty of wanting transparency. Too many union members could be intimidated to do whatever was necessary to try to see the books.

Not all union members are accountants. They do not all have commerce degrees. They are not all able to look at the books on the screen and have the union bosses stand over them, or take it home. They wanted the ability to see where some of their dollars were being spent. They may not be able to read the 100 pages of a document, while union bosses are standing over them trying to figure out what part of the document the member might want to see and for what reason he or she might want to see it.

● (1720)

I remember when Mr. Hiebert asked me to support the bill. He talked about the number of members who had come to him in regard to it. He had studied it. He had thought there must be more transparency than there was. He worked with opposition and government members, and he tried to drum up support for his private member's bill.

A lot of the new members across the way will find out about the process of a private member's bill. First, they will find out how difficult it is to be in that lottery and to get their name drawn, and then how difficult it is to actually work it through, especially in a majority government. I remember Mr. Russ Hiebert doing that.

I also remember union people coming in on both sides, questioning why we were doing it. I remember both union bosses and members thanking us, saying that it was about time.

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The legislation he brought forward in that private member's bill lifted the veil of secrecy off the union spending. Any union member, from the comfort and safety of their home, could see their unions' books, could go through it line by line, and see where the money was being spent.

We simply made it so the leaders of the unions would make public their decisions concerning the expenditure of the union dues they had collected and any other monies that were given or raised by the union.

I think Canadians would agree that this was a fair measure. A union is a public institution. It is not a profit-chasing corporation competing in the marketplace where there may be some secrets as far as marketing their product. I think most Canadians realize that charities have to do it, as do many other different groups. It is reasonable.

The second change that the previous Conservative government made to the way that unions were run in Canada was to increase the level of democracy in how unions operated in Canada. We are a democratic country. We take very serious our democracy. We govern ourselves using the method of a secret ballot. This provides a voter with the highest level of democracy and the most freedom.

Canadians would agree that unions should also conduct their affairs at the highest level of democracy. We made the change to stop workers, union members, from having to publicly inform their colleagues whether they may actually support their union, or whether certain changes that they wanted within their union did not force them to stand up publicly when a secret ballot could really have them voice their concerns.

Our changes freed workers from pressure. Both before and during the election campaigns, unions spent millions of dollars to straight partisan ends. Union bosses can do that because they are under no obligation to tell anyone if they did. My wife is in a union; she is a registered nurse. She told me about the day, and I think it was before I was elected, when the union boss came from Edmonton to our little town and told the registered nurses how they would vote. She was sitting in the meeting. She questioned it. All of a sudden there were hums and haws, but it was intimidation. Union bosses can do that because they are under no obligation for anything.

Some unions do tell what they will do and how they are involved, but some union bosses proudly provide details of how they spend union dues fighting a political party that in some cases supported many members of that very union.

I believe, with all due respect, that the measure we are debating today is payback to the unions for them showing up when the now Prime Minister made announcements. We saw the emails. We saw them go out. They would say that Justin was in town, that they needed 100 people in the picture. I think we are now seeing some of that payback.

Other unions do say how their money is being spent. Again, we wanted to see transparency. We want to see measures brought forward so that democracy was enhanced even within the unions.

Our previous government gave union members the right to know what was going on within their union. It also gave them the right to

vote. Why? Because the union is an important institution. The union, in some places, can intervene on behalf of their workers. When we do not have transparency, pretty soon we have an institution that crumbles.

• (1725)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are many aspects of the member's speech that I would like to comment on, but first to I want acknowledge the great value our unions play in society today. We in the Liberal Party believe that is the case. The question is whether the Conservatives believe likewise.

Another point I would like to emphasize is that the member made reference to the Liberal Party's priorities in legislation. I can assure the member that the government's first piece of legislation was a tax break to the middle class of Canada. This was very important to the Liberal Party. Also important to the Liberal Party is the importance of having good solid relationships between labour and management. We saw the poisonous atmosphere that was created by the Conservative government. This bill is about rectifying a wrong.

Would the member not acknowledge that by introducing the legislation as Conservatives did through the back door, they denied the opportunity on the different stakeholders, both labour and management, to make presentations to the minister? It should have been done with full consultation when they changed the legislation.

• (1730)

Hon. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, I know the members who have been in the House for years remember the great work of Garry Breitkreuz. I remember Mr. Breitkreuz fighting for private members' bills. It was a way that the backbencher in this place could bring forward proposals, could bring forward issues that perhaps constituents had brought forward.

Again, we see the Liberal Party now asking, who needs private members' bills? The Liberals are in a majority government and they are going to ram through what they want. If I were a backbench Liberal MP, I would be disappointed with that type of attitude. Every member is an important member. Even if a member is not in the front row, every member has the ability to initiate legislation and change law in our country. That is what Mr. Hiebert did. He did his homework and he saw this thing through. Yes, it was a controversial bill, but when we enhance transparency, when we enhance accountability, we can leave saying that we have accomplished something.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I suspect there is a little red light and a bell that goes off in the Conservative lobby every time a Conservative MP says "big union bosses". It seems to pepper every one of their speeches.

I would like to clarify this for my friend. He may not have ever attended a union meeting of any kind. However, on the idea that an outside big union boss, according to the Conservatives, would be able to come to into a room full of nurses and tell them how to vote, my friend has a deep misconception of how nurses and union members in our country think, which is entirely independent of what their leadership may or may not say on a given election.

The acts the Conservatives brought in were going to cost the Canadian taxpayer more than \$21 million and were opposed by not just every labour union in the country, but were opposed by the Canadian Bar Association and the NHL Players' Association. My friend can hate on hockey and I will let him take that defence if he wants, but if what he was looking for was accountability and transparency, I would have suggested that the Conservatives could have started with themselves. They gave us every Senate scandal for the last 10 years. They were unable to account for the three-quarters of a billion dollars they spent on self-promoting ads. A little do as we say, not as we do was the Conservative agenda.

If we want to have labour peace in our country, allow unions to form as they always have.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, there are no red lights going off in our lobby when we talk about big union bosses. I think there is a red light going off in the NDP lobby when anyone stands and says “big gas, big oil”, but there are no red lights going off here.

We realize that whether it be more transparency for members of Parliament through an accountability act, more transparency to councils of first nation groups through the First Nations Financial Transparency Act, and likewise with unions, we want to see important institutions and other levels of government having the most transparent, the most accountable organizations. Charities have it. They have put their books in order. They have full accounting and transparency. Charities realize that their charitable number is why they have to do it. Unions should do the same.

Any time the NDP members stand and say that the unions should be able to do whatever they want, nobody is discussing whether unions have fulfilled an important role in our country's past or not. Undoubtedly they have. Do they have a role in the future? Yes, but we need transparency and accountability with that group. That is what our amendments originally brought forward.

• (1735)

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am usually pleased to take part in the debates of the House of Commons. However, that is not the case today, because the Liberal values do not represent the values of union members. In fact, they are quite removed from the values of a responsible government that were bequeathed by our Conservative government. In the last Parliament, we gave a voice to union members on fundamental values.

To do away with transparency and the freedom afforded by a secret ballot shows the lack of respect of the Liberal government, which is practising the politics of avoidance. It is sad to see that the Liberals have bowed to pressure from union leaders. That is completely unacceptable. I am being polite in using the word “pressure”. “Returning the favour” would be a more accurate way of putting it.

Unions do have a role to play. Union members have chosen to pay dues so that the unions will stand up for their rights and negotiate working conditions that are acceptable to and benefit both parties. They did not choose to pay dues to be involved in horror stories, such as the ones we have all heard about from friends who were victims or the ones we were personally involved in.

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I would like to talk about one of my uncles, Laurendeau, God rest his soul. In the early 1970s, he chose to vote, by show of hands, against a strike, because he thought it was fair and just that he should work to feed his family. Even for the company he worked for, it was more important to get the job done and deliver the boats they were building on time, to ensure that the company would survive.

In the middle of January, when it was -35°, someone sent him a gift of bricks. The bricks did not come through the chimney or the front door, but through the window. Two windows were broken, in the middle of the winter, at two o'clock in the morning. Imagine the trauma to my uncle, my aunt, and my cousin, who was seven years old at the time.

That is just one example. As everyone knows, such situations have some similarities, such as intimidation, harassment, bigotry, exclusion, and abuse of power, which can lead to occupational and psychological burnout that is sometimes irreversible.

In this day and age, at a time when the values of freedom and transparency are attainable, it makes no sense and it is completely unacceptable to take away rights from unionized workers.

Imagine if Canadians were asked to vote by show of hands in a general election, at a community centre, at a pre-set time, with the pressure of the candidates looking on or staring at them. That is what the Liberal government is going to do to union members, in addition to whipping the vote. The party line for moral issues—how shameful. In addition, this is rather simplistic for us as legislators.

My concerns reflect those of thousands, even millions, of Canadians who are outraged that the Liberal government wants to let union bosses help themselves to the money and have their palms greased. We recognize a Liberal way of doing things that is nothing new. I believe, as do Canadians who are concerned about the politics of avoidance, that centralizing power in the hands of the minority and using fear tactics to serve one's own interests is highly unethical. I hope that my colleagues opposite will understand what I mean by the politics of avoidance without a photo to illustrate.

• (1740)

I am talking about how they are failing to defend democracy, failing to be accountable, failing to commit, failing to protect everyone no matter their status, failing to step up to their responsibilities as a government, and choosing to benefit a minority at the expense of the common good.

I am afraid that this Liberal government's politics of avoidance is just the beginning. To date, it has excelled in just one area: social activities that involve selfies and extras.

Government Orders

Our Prime Minister is a national joke. Transparent for the smart phone cameras he might be, but stand up for transparency in democratic institutions and organizations he cannot. He is an embarrassment.

Not long ago, he was a leader who promised to stand up for the middle class, but he hoodwinked millions of Canadians with his grand promises. As citizens, workers, retirees, parents, individuals, and a country, we all stand to lose so much in the end.

This plan serves merely to enhance the image and serve the interests of an egotistical individual who is running away. Yes, this Prime Minister is running away from making real decisions for a strong, prosperous, and safe society and economy like the ones we bequeathed to him just 100 days ago.

I would like to list just some of the so-called changes introduced by this government: tax hikes, an end to income splitting, cuts for families earning less than \$60,000 a year that use tax-free savings accounts to put money aside, a threat to the child care tax credit, an end to the air strikes against ISIS, along with never-ending deficits that will cripple the economic future of our country, our children and our grandchildren.

As though that were not enough for the first 100 days of this regressive agenda, now the Liberals are coddling union leaders instead of standing up for dues-paying members, our noble workers who have a right to vote according to their convictions and in complete secrecy.

It is high time that whoever is pulling the strings within the Liberal government did something to ensure that its actions reflect the values of a responsible government that promotes transparency and the right to exercise one's right to vote in a respectful manner. Is anyone running that giant Liberal ship? There is still time to prevent our country from sinking.

It is both completely ironic and worthy of a soap opera to see this Prime Minister everywhere except at work, to see him flippantly reveal a security plan to foreigners, in another country altogether, with no regard for his own citizens, without the consent of the House and without consulting duly elected parliamentarians. This is a Prime Minister who is asking his own party members to ignore their moral values and toe the party line on an issue as delicate and fraught with consequences as the one currently under debate.

In closing, I am very sorry to say that the coziness between the Liberal Party and big union bosses definitely flies in the face of democracy and violates the rights not only of union members, but of all Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Intergovernmental Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the comments from across the way and was reminded of a parliamentary secretary who ended up in leg irons. I do not think I ever covered an election campaign as a journalist where there were not allegations of cheating. In fact, court cases proved that. In fact, young people from that party who were sent to the courts as adults did not face justice. Now we are being lectured on what transparency and ethics should be adhered to in this House.

However, what really confused me in the speech we just heard was the member's own rhetoric. On the one hand, it is a Conservative bill that is to be repealed; on the other hand it is a private member's bill. Which is it? Was the bill that is to be repealed introduced by the Conservative Party through the back doors of private members' bills? Or, was it government legislation masquerading as private members' business?

When they introduce a private member's bill, they do so knowing that it will not be subjected to the full scrutiny of this House because that is the process. That is the process that a private member's bill goes through that a government bill does not.

● (1745)

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, as a result of the bill from my colleague opposite, unionized workers will no longer have access to a secret ballot or financial transparency. This bill had teeth and was truly democratic. The bill introduced by the Liberals is a step backwards for Canadian society.

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, prior to being elected I was fortunate to work for 16 years with a major Canadian union, the teamsters union, and I represented workers and went to many union meetings. In fact, I went to monthly meetings for 16 years. I represented workers in many certification drives when they tried to get organized before the Canada Industrial Relations Board. The practice of the board when we had card check was that if a union signed up a majority of people, the union submitted that to the board. The board had the ability to certify without a vote, and the advantage was that it often happened before the employer found out. When an employer found out that a union drive was going on, that is when there were massive unfair labour practices.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Don Davies: I hear the Conservatives laughing. I spent 16 years at the labour board fighting those very complaints where workers would get fired. They would get intimidated. Families would lose paycheques because employers tried to intimidate workers against unionizing.

My question is this. The board could always order a vote, in any circumstance. Why is it that the Conservatives want to take away from the board the discretion to certify without a vote, when to do so is simply respecting the right of Canadian workers to organize, as is their right under international convention and treaty?

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

My speech today had to do with the fundamental rights that unionized Canadians will lose: the right to know where their union dues are going, through transparency of financial statements, and the right to a secret ballot if they so choose. It is always easier to vote one's conscience by secret ballot than voting in front of a bunch of thugs.

Government Orders

[English]

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all of my colleagues on this side of the House for the clarity they have brought to this debate.

It is clear that Bill C-4 goes against the principles of transparency and accountability and against the wishes of many union members themselves. I am wondering if my hon. colleague would comment further on this.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I would like the Liberal Party opposite to allow each Liberal member in the House to vote freely, based on their own beliefs, on this bill. We will see whether the bill that was introduced in the last Parliament truly represented Canadian values.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today in the House to represent the thousands of unionized workers in my riding of Regina—Qu'Appelle, thousands of members of unions who work at EVRAZ steel, making steel for pipelines, members of unions that represent workers who work in electrical, pipefitting, all different types of industries, who rely upon their employment through our energy sector.

I know the bill is about the internal workings of unions and not about the job-killing practices that we have seen over the past few weeks, such as opposition to energy east, opposition to pipelines that would help keep those unionized workers working. The bill is more about the internal mechanisms of how the unions conduct themselves.

I want to touch upon a few things.

I do not know that the questions and comments we have heard from other parties are even relevant. Whether or not it was a government bill or a private member's bill should not matter. This is now a Liberal bill that we are looking at, a Liberal bill to repeal certain provisions of the act. That is what we should be talking about. It does not matter how they got in there. We are now talking about whether or not we should remove them. I hope that if my colleagues do have questions or comments for me, they worry less about the process from the last Parliament and more about the effect of the bill that is actually before the House.

Let us talk about disclosure, first and foremost.

Where do unions get their money? They get their money from forced union dues. They get their money from workers in a company, in a place of business, who have absolutely no choice. Whether or not they want to support that union, that money is taken right off their paycheque. It is taken off their paycheque in much the same way that Revenue Canada works with employers to take money out of the pockets of hard-working Canadians. It is the exact same way. It is held at source.

In a lot of ways, the union has the same kind of taxing authority that the federal government has. The workers have just as much choice as to whether they want to pay their taxes as to whether or not

they want to pay their union dues. If they do not pay their union dues, they are out of the union, and they are out of a job.

Where does that money go? We do not know.

Well, we do know kind of know because we hear the ads on the radio and we see the ads on TV during elections. We know the big unions get together and put a lot of money to engage in political partisan electioneering. It has nothing to do with helping the workers they represent. It has nothing to do with getting them a better deal, a better collective bargaining agreement. However, it does have a lot to do with whether or not their favourite political party does better or worse in an election. We heard a lot of those ads and saw a lot of those flyers go out.

I am accountable for everything I put out under my name. If I put a ten percenter or a householder out to my constituents and they do not like it, they can do something about it in the next election. If I put out a campaign flyer that touches a wrong note, that angers some people, I might lose votes over it.

Those unions can put those flyers out. They can make all kinds of outrageous allegations of no truth whatsoever to the types of things that they accuse us of doing and there is no accountability for it. When Canadians go to the ballot box, they do not have a right to effect change in the union representatives who decided to spend that money, but they have a right to elect or not elect members of political parties.

They have all the powers of the federal government with none of the accountability when it comes to that type of taxation power through union dues.

We have heard some of the counter-arguments about why unions should not be held to the same standard on disclosure. If I was to say that other types of charities are not held to that account, I believe my colleague made the point, when he introduced the bill, those charities do not have the power to compel people to donate to them. The unions do.

If I am in a steelworkers' union, that money comes out of my cheque. I have no choice. I have more of a right to know what they are doing with my money than the charities that I can make a choice to give to or not. If a charity publishes its books or has good spending practices, I can say I will support that charity because I think it is spending that money effectively. If it does not, if its spending practices are questionable, if there are allegations that it might be paying executives exorbitant salaries and not actually helping the people it claims to help, I can keep that money in my own pocket and give it to a different charity. However, I cannot with my union. If I do not make my union dues payment, and there is no mechanism not to, but if I found a way not to, I would be out of the union and out of a job.

That is why the threshold for disclosure needs to be just as high as for the federal government.

The other big part of the bill is the secret ballot.

Government Orders

• (1750)

This is when I thought that I know the Liberals have to reward their friends who helped them during the election. It happens a lot in politics; political parties make promises maybe without even expecting to win, then they do, and now they have to follow through on it, but I thought the one thing they might resist the temptation for is the secret ballot. What is wrong with the secret ballot?

This bill will likely get to committee and I hope that our friends across the way, even the New Democrats, will surely agree on this. What is the democratic problem with the secret ballot? Say there is a union resolution to boycott Israel, for example, as several big Canadian unions have done. Maybe some union members would like to vote against that union resolution, but they know that some of the people encouraging them to vote for it may be the ones who are tasked to defend them in a grievance, so they are a little afraid to do so if it is a vote by show of hands. Why not a secret ballot when it comes to certification or decertification? What is wrong with a secret ballot? Every one of us here was elected by secret ballot, as well as town councils, municipalities, and provincial governments. This has been the fundamental practice in our democratic system for such a long time that it has become part of our democratic way of life.

I have not yet heard one compelling argument against the secret ballot. It makes me suspicious. I hate to attribute motive, because I know we are all supposed to take each other at our word, but it makes me suspicious about why the Liberals are doing this. What do the union bosses have a problem with, and why are they telling the Liberals that they have to ride roughshod over a democratic principle of secret ballots, that they have to include it in this bill? I hope we can isolate this at committee and, at the very least, agree that when it comes to votes on these types of things, unions should have secret ballots so that workers have the same protections that they have when they go to the ballot box to elect their government.

I have always found the mentality of big labour in Canada confusing. For full disclosure, my father was heavily involved in his union during his working career, so I heard his perspective of it. I know why unions came about and what the need was for unions at a time in Canada when many workers did not have basic protections that now so many of us enjoy, both workers in unionized fields and non-unionized fields. However, the degree to which unions will sacrifice jobs for its members versus jobs for its union executives is what I cannot understand.

• (1755)

Over the Christmas break, many of us heard the news that Goodwill in Toronto closed its doors. Why did it close its doors? The economy is tough all over, which is part of it, and part of it had to do with a lease issue, but a big part of it was its union not recognizing the financial difficulties that this particular store was in. It was holding out for 100% of the benefits and 100% of the entitlements, but it was willing to lose 100% of the jobs, and that is, in fact, what happened. In order to try to preserve every last bit of what the workers had in their agreement, the whole store closed. Are those workers better off because their union executive went to the wall, went to court, spent probably hundreds of thousands of dollars in this dispute, and now it has closed the doors?

I do not know if my colleagues from Toronto have spoken to any members of the union. Are they happy with the way their union ran the show? Do they have a great victory as they sit at home without jobs, knowing that their union fought the fight, lost the war, but won that battle and are now out of business? We see this all over the place in the Canadian economy, whether it is the auto workers or other types of big unions. They are willing to sacrifice the jobs of all to protect the jobs of the union executive.

Here in Ottawa, quite a few years ago, there was a transit strike over the issue of scheduling. The Goodwill article is the same type of thing. The issue was over scheduling and who would get the most hours. Does anyone know who the number one victim is when it comes to these types of union actions? It is young workers. It is newly hired workers. The entire fight was that the union wanted to lay off the most recent hires and protect the jobs of those who had been around longer. It is new entrants into the workforce. These are the actions of unions. Time and time again across the country, the very people who they claim to help, the young workers, people entering the workforce, people trying to start a living and raise a family, are the ones who lose first when these types of actions come about.

I want to go back to the main point just before I wrap up. I think this bill is wrong because it takes away disclosure, makes unions less accountable, and most important, it takes away one of the most fundamental principles of Canadian democracy, and that is the secret ballot.

• (1800)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was interesting to listen to the member's comments. Let us put it into the perspective of these Conservative private members' bills that were introduced a little while ago. Let me remind the House that no one was calling for the legislation. Businesses, management, and unions were not coming to the Conservative government stating that they wanted this legislation. In fact, it was a Conservative-driven bill.

If we want to have good labour relations in the country, we should be promoting harmony, consensus building, and so forth. If we want to come up with a way not to develop legislation, we should look at the way in which the Conservative government brought in this unfair labour legislation over a year ago.

My question to the member is this. Would he at least acknowledge that, by the Conservative government bringing in this legislation in the manner it did, a lot of the normal procedures that ministers are obligated to follow were foregone, not the procedures with respect to the House? Also, does he recognize that this bill rectifies a wrong that the government brought against labour prior to the last election?

Mr. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate my hon. colleague, as I know that having an opportunity to speak in the House was not something he was often able to do. However, I was always happy to be graced with one of his interventions.

Government Orders

I will say that the member is again getting trapped in this process argument. He is living in the past. He must live in the now. We are looking at a bill that would have an effect on our legislation right now. It would have an effect on unions right now. How we got here is irrelevant to me, whether through private member's bills or a government bill, but what is relevant is what this bill would do right now.

The member talked about who was asking for it. I know lots of members of unions. My mother was a member of the nurses union. She would get all kinds of garbage in the quarterly newsletter about what the union was up to. Some unions spend time and union dues on anti-Israel boycotts and all kinds of political posturing, or they make political statements on things that have nothing to do with labour relations. My mom and many of the steelworkers in Regina, who do not want to see their union dues go to those types of things, supported our legislation in the previous Parliament.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think it is interesting that my colleague mentioned the trades of members of his riding. I would like to draw attention to something that Canada's Building Trades Unions put forward around this piece of legislation. It stated:

Canada's Building Trades Unions are very pleased with the introduction of repeal legislation for Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. [They] are pleased this is one of the first pieces of Government legislation introduced in the 42nd Parliament.

Therefore, I would ask the member this. Will he stand with unionized workers in his riding in the building trades, repeal this regressive legislation, and help grow the Canadian economy?

Mr. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is confused that, because a union executive or entity has made a statement, it in any way reflects the views of its members. That is what we are talking about today—the disconnect between the executive and the workers. What the individual workers want is jobs. They want the ability to ply their trade. They want to weld two pieces of pipe together and make electrical circuits work. They want to put steel together into the form of pipelines.

In my riding, I had unionized members who were telling me when I got to the door that they were thinking about voting NDP, that their union executive invited the NDP candidate to the local and kind of talked about the labour laws and stuff like that. I said, “There is only one party in the House of Commons that supports new pipelines. If you work for a company that makes pipelines and you vote NDP you will have great labour legislation; there will be very powerful union executives and your union bosses may be able to do a whole lot of things that they were not able to do before, but you will be out of a job. Your union executives will still have a job.”

That is the irony here, that the last people to lose their job at a facility or a plant are usually the union bosses who negotiated themselves right there in the first place.

• (1805)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill C-4. As a member who was elected to the House right off the job site and a proud member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, I am very pleased to be speaking to this legislation.

We have heard a lot in the debate. The hon. member was just talking about the executive and the membership. I come from a union where the rank and file were quite upset with Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. They wanted to see them go. They go to their monthly meetings and discuss what kind of spending is going to happen at the executive level, right down to approving the credit card bill, on a monthly basis, of the people who work in the office. I do not think there is any doubt in the minds of most members of my union that they have the opportunity, not just to get the information about how their local union is spending money, but also to have a say in open meetings.

There is a fabricated argument for transparency. For those who need the transparency because it is their dues money being spent, they have access to that information and have had access to that information. In that sense, the bill was a solution looking for a problem.

The executive in my union know well that the power they have when it comes to working with industry, finding jobs for members and making sure that members get fair pay and good benefits for the work they do, does not come from any particular piece of legislation. Obviously, like any other good institution, we need enabling legislation, not persecuting legislation, as I would say Bill C-377 and C-525 are. The power of the executive of my union comes from the membership. It comes from the good work that we do every day. It comes from the quality product that we produce on site. It comes from the extra training that our union provides to our members so that we are out there being the best in the industry. That is why our contractors, like the electrical contractors of Manitoba, have worked quite collaboratively with my local. They know that our union is providing added value to the projects they do, and frankly that we are making them more money. That is what we hear in the dialogue with our contractors.

I am in a tight spot, because of course I do not want to be unparliamentary. I do not want to attribute ulterior motives to any particular party. However, the level of ignorance that one would have to attribute to people making some of the arguments I have heard in the chamber today, such as ignorance about the way that unions work, about the relationship in the building trades between the unions and contractors, verges on unparliamentary. Therefore, I am feeling in a bit of a tight spot.

I do not want to do any of that, so perhaps I will talk instead about the degree and extent to which the legislation has to be seen not just on its own. If we consider it on its own, then some of the red herrings we have heard today may be effective. However, we need to consider it in the context of a government program that brought in Bill C-377, Bill C-525 and Bill C-59. When railroad workers were going into negotiations with their employer and Canada Post workers were going into negotiations with their employer, they were threatened. Sometimes before they even had the strike vote, they were threatened that they would be legislated back to work.

Government Orders

We need to consider it in the context of a government, some of whose members were making comments such as we heard again today from members from the Conservative Party, criticizing the Rand formula and mandatory union dues. We need to consider it in the context of a government that limited access to EI so that workers were more afraid of challenging their employer, because in the case of a layoff they would not be able to pay their mortgage and feed their families. We need to consider it in the context of a government that refused to talk to the provinces when they asked to increase the Canada pension plan, so that employees who were ready to retire could not leave the workforce, putting downward pressure on wages and blocking opportunities for young people to be promoted within their companies. When we consider it in that context, it is impossible to say that those bills were not meant as an anti-union program. It had very little to do with anything that was coming from the rank and file of labour unions, and everything to do with a government that was working hand in hand with employers to put downward pressure on the working conditions and wages of Canadian workers.

● (1810)

That is part of why these bills were so shameful. It is not just for the content of the bill; we have heard a lot about what was wrong with the content of the bills. They were part of a deliberate and sustained program to make life harder for Canadian workers so that corporations that were already, over that timeframe, making record profits could add a little more to their margins. In a time when corporations were seeing their tax rate go from 28% to 15%, they could squeeze a little bit more out of their workers.

When the economy is working well, we have labour peace. We have labour peace, not when employees are being held under the thumb of their employers, but when they are free to negotiate collectively with their employers and work for fair wages and fair benefits. We know that the union movement, over time and today, contributed to that and contributes to that. We know by the behaviour of many employers, and I dare say even some governments, that if we did not continue to have a strong labour movement in Canada, we would soon lose those gains that were hard fought and hard won over the last 100 or 150 years. That is why we on these benches are concerned to see a legislative environment that allows the union movement to thrive.

We hear sometimes that times were tough and we may have needed some unions to help with workplace conditions, but by and large really, prosperity just spontaneously came out of the industrial revolution. Forgotten in that account is that the organization of workers went hand in hand with that, and it was not until workers were organized that those gains actually came.

I think we need to be careful that we not give credit for the accomplishments of the labour movement to employers that would still be, and we know that they would still be, treating their workers in the way that they treated them in the 19th century. In parts of the world, the very same employers, operating in Canada in some cases, are treating their workers in other parts of the world as if it was the 19th century.

We would have to be very naive indeed to believe that, if there was not the legislative framework and if there was not the strong labour movement that we have had in Canada here, those same

employers would not get the idea that maybe they could treat their Canadian workers that way too. I think we need to be very careful that we not attribute the good conditions and the good wages that some Canadian workers continue to enjoy to the benevolence of their employer, but acknowledge that those were gained hard fought and hard won.

I would say that in their more enlightened moments, some employers, like some of the employers that I am glad we have in the electrical industry in Manitoba, know that it has been overall good for them. It has created a customer base. Employees who have disposable incomes can afford their homes and are not worried about their families. They have child care. We can get into all the issues, but largely workers, well paid, well fed, and well housed are more productive, and that is good for Canadian employers.

Again, I think it speaks to the shame of the previous government that it would have sought unsolicited, except maybe by some employers, but certainly not by a groundswell of Canadian workers, to disrupt that partnership that had developed. This is not always easy. We had arrived at a place in Canada where at least some workers, and usually unionized workers, were getting a fair return on the work they did and that employers were benefiting from having those productive workers.

I do not think it is the place of a government to go and intentionally disrupt that. We can talk about what is in the particular context of those bills. I do not think it is very good, but certainly when we look at the larger context, that seems to be the case. It is one of the reasons I ran. I did not think we could tolerate having a government that bent on disrupting that relationship between the labour movement and employers and making sure that workers got their fair share. It is why I can hardly wait to stand in favour of the bill.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Intergovernmental Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to debate this afternoon and I keep hearing the reference to the secret ballot. The speaker just before spoke about the need for a secret ballot so we could curtail certain activities of the union: political activities, advertising activities, even the setting of dues.

I went to the union that was referenced and I read their bylaws, available on Google. Every single person making a decision in that union is elected by secret ballot. I was wondering if the member opposite could provide further detail as to the use of the secret ballot as prescribed in both international and national organizations. How extensive is the use of the secret ballot in establishing union policies, union dues, union membership, as well as union executives who make the decisions on behalf of the delegated authority ascribed to them through a secret ballot, which will not be affected by this legislation in one way or another?

● (1815)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that in my union and in any one I have ever heard of, the leadership of the union is elected by secret ballot.

Government Orders

We hear about this alleged disconnect between the executive and the members, and certainly in any democratic institution there can be disconnect between those elected and the people who elect them. That might well have happened in some governments. I am not going to deny that it can happen from time to time. That can happen between shareholders and the board of a corporation. It can happen in all sorts of democratic contexts.

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that in that context, just as in the general context, members have recourse. If they do not like what they see in their newsletter, they can get involved with their union. They can elect a different union executive. That is the recourse that we have.

At any time when members want to ask about how that money is being spent, they can ask that question and have access to that information.

When people belong to a democratic organization there is no substitute to being involved. This is not getting rid of secret ballots in unions. In fact it is not even necessarily getting rid of votes, but is just creating an option not to have one to avoid what we know are sometimes abuses by employers of employees.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, some of this across-the-aisle discussion between the Liberals and the NDP makes it seem like there is one party on this.

I found the comments by the member for Spadina—Fort York somewhat interesting. He said there were secret ballots sometimes. It reminds me of a play on a Mackenzie King quote, a secret ballot if necessary, but not necessarily a secret ballot.

Why would a secret ballot be okay for some votes for the executive and not for the certification vote itself? It is kind of fundamental to a democratic vote and the social democratic norms that the union movement tends to promote.

My question for the hon. member after his speech is as follows. I have listened to this debate intently and have spoken to many union members and labour leaders in my riding. I have still not heard one cogent argument to suggest why, in this modern age when transparency and disclosure is the norm, that for expenditures above the reasonable threshold of \$5,000, the bright light of transparency would not be appropriate for this movement which people are required by law to pay dues into, as previous speakers have said?

What is feared about the bright light of transparency? I have not heard. The previous bills of the last government did not attack any of the fundamental rights of belonging to a union, and did not say that unions have not made some progress.

Why is this one organization exempt from basic, fundamental transparency? I am still waiting to hear an answer from that hon. member.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the member would say that this one organization would be exempt.

In fact, by the Conservative argument, it is in part because there is a tax write-off on the dues, that unions are being publicly funded essentially and that is why they need to disclose this information. We provide tax write-offs to all sorts of businesses, and they are not required to disclose any purchases over \$5,000. To say that

somehow unions are getting special treatment by not having to disclose expenses over \$5,000 strikes me as kind of rich, frankly.

There are good reasons why, for instance, a union may not want to divulge the contents of a strike fund. If they want to be the hard-nosed economic people the Conservatives often claim they are, when there is a labour dispute and if employers knew they only had to wait three months for that strike fund to run out versus having to wait six months to a year, they could plan and prepare to ride that out. That would not be fair to the workers who are withholding their labour in order to get a fair deal for the work they do.

It makes all kinds of sense, just in the way I am sure the hon. member would be up, red-faced, on his feet, if we suggested that private companies ought to disclose any purchase over \$5,000.

• (1820)

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak on Bill C-4.

We heard a lot from the other two parties about the importance of unions and the union environment, and I agree. Unions play an important role in our society and our economy, but they also have to keep up to pace with the modern society and modern economy that we now have in the 21st century.

I am proud to have been a long-time union member. I was a member of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, PSAC. I was a member of the Canadian Association of Professional Employees. I was also a member of CUPE. I know first-hand about being a member of a union and the benefits that union membership does bring to a number of people in the workforce. However, at the same time, it is also essential that unions are subject to a fair and effective regulatory process to ensure that unions serve their members and not just their union bosses. Bill C-4, however, would remove such regulations and protections, and that is why I will not be supporting it.

The current Liberal government brought Bill C-4 to repeal two private members' bills passed by the 41st Parliament: Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. While the other parties make some obscure claims that these bills are attacks on unions, when one actually reads the bills, it is very clear that it is simply not the case.

Bill C-377 amended the Income Tax Act, requiring union management to file a standard set of financials each year to be posted on the CRA website. These requirements are not unreasonable. In fact, if a union boss were proud of the work he or she was doing, he or she should be more than willing to show his or her strong financial management within his or her union environment.

Bill C-377 was carefully examined by Parliament through the private members' bill process. It went to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, where many groups expressed their support for the bill, including the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses, and Merit Canada.

Government Orders

The transparency requirements introduced in Bill C-377 do not weaken unions. In fact, they empower union members. Union members and all Canadians are able to receive quicker and easier access to information on how their mandatory union fees are being used. This is essential. Union fees are not optional; they are mandatory. What else is mandatory? Canadian taxes.

We as parliamentarians all spend Canadian tax dollars with our expense claims, and we as parliamentarians post our expenses online for our constituents to see. Union dues are the same. They are forced mandatory fees, and Canadians and those who pay fees should have access to that information, especially when these fees are being used to undertake political activities.

Mandatory union fees should be used to support and protect the wages, rights, and benefits of their members. However, for purposes beyond that, members should be entitled to know where their money is going and how it is being spent. It is imperative that those who are forced to pay union fees have easy access to that information so they can hold their representatives and their directors accountable. It allows members to ensure that their union leaders are spending their hard-earned money in a way that is responsible and not for the personal or political gain of union leadership.

As I said at the outset, I am a former union member. In 2012, I was a member of PSAC, local 610. In that year, we saw a provincial election in Quebec, and PSAC came out and openly endorsed the Parti Québécois in the Quebec provincial election. Here we had PSAC, a federal government union, supporting tens of thousands of federal public servants, openly endorsing a separatist party in Quebec. As a union member, I was disgusted by that. I was disgusted by the fact that my union would go out and openly support a party that had no other *raison d'être* than ruining and breaking up this country. It was unconscionable that it happened, but it did.

During the 2014 provincial election in Ontario, because my wife is a nurse and a member of a local union, our home voice mail was constantly flooded with union messages telling us whom we should not be voting for. They did not go so far as to tell us who we should be voting for, but they simply told us that one particular party would cause all kinds of job losses. Of course, now we are seeing those same job losses under Kathleen Wynne in Ontario, but the union seems to be quiet on that particular subject.

Here is the thought: these unions need to be accountable to their members on how they spend in a clear and transparent manner, especially when we are talking about political activities undertaken by union membership with forced and mandatory union dues.

I want to talk briefly now about Bill C-525, which amended the Canada Labour Code to require certification and decertification votes to be held by secret ballot. This protects individuals from undue pressure and intimidation, and it allows secret ballot for workers to decide how they want to be represented, and not to be pressured by their co-workers or union bosses.

● (1825)

I have been listening very closely to the arguments on the other side against the secret ballot, and I have yet to hear one single coherent answer on what is wrong with the secret ballot for certification and decertification votes. We have heard our other

members suggest how secret ballots are used in other types of union activities and why there is such an inherent challenge with using secret ballots for a certification vote. We just simply have not had an answer on that. The secret ballot is a fundamental element of a fair and democratic process. It is something that I, as a parliamentarian, am proud to stand for and proud to endorse. Bill C-525 and Bill C-377 were not attacks on unions. However, Bill C-4 is an attack on accountability and transparency.

In his letter to Canadians on November 4, 2015, the Prime Minister said, "That is why we committed to set a higher bar for openness and transparency". The government across the way claims to be all for openness and transparency, but if it were really for that, it would not be going ahead with the repeal of these two bills. It is very clear that openness and transparency is a mushy subject for the Liberals across the way, and how they selectively choose to define it is really up to them, it seems.

Finally, I want to talk about that canard that we have been hearing time and again from the Liberals across the way, that private members' bills are somehow a way of getting legislation in through the back door. I am proud to be a member of this House. I worked hard to get to this place. We knocked on more than 30,000 doors in Perth—Wellington, and I am proud to come in through that front door and to represent my constituents in Perth—Wellington here. I am proud to have the ability, as a private member, to introduce legislation that I feel supports the people of Perth—Wellington and supports the people of Canada as a whole. It is disgusting that the Liberals would refer to this as going through the back door of legislation. We have rights as parliamentarians, and I am proud to stand on behalf of those rights. I am proud to be a member of a party that saw, under the Conservative government, more private members' bills pass in the 41st Parliament than at any time before then.

I am proud that our party allows free votes on private members' business, and on votes of conscience for that matter, unlike the members across the way. I am proud to be standing in this House, representing the people of Perth—Wellington, and I am proud to be voting against Bill C-4, which would be a step backward for openness and transparency.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Intergovernmental Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again I googled the constitution that the member referenced, in terms of PSAC, and once again it found provisions for secret ballots all the way through the constitution. If a member of a union disagrees with a position taken by the executive, through secret ballot he or she can change that, unless of course the majority of the union disagrees with that individual.

Government Orders

The reason we refer to this as a back-door process is not that it is a private member's bill; it is because the changes that were being brought to independent democratic organizations were being done, not through a full parliamentary process, not through the full parliamentary debate to which government bills are subjected, but through a truncated one that the private members' bills go through. It is a different process, and to pretend otherwise is to pretend that this place does not treat private members' bills differently from government business.

My question for the member opposite is very simple. Secret balloting is available to him to change the platform and the policies of his union. Why did he choose to come to Parliament to affect the union business rather than stay in the union and affect it through the process guaranteed in the constitution to which he has signed on? Why did the member not stay in the union and change that with his membership, unless of course the members disagreed with him and disagreed with the bill that his party brought forward?

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be here in this House and no longer in the union, because I am proud to stand here on behalf of all Canadians and to work on behalf of Canadians to further their rights of openness and transparency for all union members.

The member talks about the secret ballot and PSAC, which leads to this question. If the secret ballot is throughout the constitution of PSAC and many other unions, why not for certification and decertification votes? It goes back to private members' business. I want to go back to that subject. Methinks the hon. member doth protest too much. Perhaps that is the way the Liberals' government is going to run their private members' business, just using it for matters that are not of great concern and for shuffling anything off to the side that they do not feel like discussing, through private members' business. However, I am proud to be part of a party that encourages all sorts of private members' business, and not just the ones that the hon. member opposite might think are appropriate to discuss as a private member's bill.

• (1830)

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member opposite has mentioned a few times how proud he is to be part of a party that has democracy and transparency as a tradition, and I commend him for that. I am a democrat as well.

How does he feel about omnibus bills and the practice of the previous government in that regard?

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, speaking to bills is part of parliamentary procedure and I am pleased to do it. Any number of bills can come forward, including omnibus bills.

The fact of the matter is that we often hear people discussing the 460-page budget bill. We should be more than willing to read through 460 pages of legislation if we are here to do our job as parliamentarians. I am more than happy to read through any number of documents that come before the House, and I try to read every bill that we vote on, including Bill C-4, which I have read from cover to cover. It is a bad bill and it is not reflective of the hard-working union members in my riding and the hard-working union members I spoke to throughout the campaign and after the campaign.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier I heard the member say that, in 2012, he learned that his union was spending his dues on endorsing a separatist party in Quebec, which was against his wishes.

Did his union personally consult him before it decided what to do with his money?

[*English*]

Mr. John Nater: The answer is no, Mr. Speaker. I was not consulted on whether or not I thought my union dues or my union should be endorsing a separatist party in Quebec. Clearly my answer would have been completely different from my union's.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate. I will let the hon. member for Prince Albert know that there are only about five minutes remaining in the time allocated for government orders for the afternoon. I will give him the usual signal in five minutes. He will have the remaining time when the House gets back to debate on the question.

The hon. member for Prince Albert.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening all day and I am curious in trying to understand a few things. I think of the constituents in my riding of Prince Albert, and I ask the member for Durham why now? Why would the Liberal government in this scenario, in our environment of unemployment, job losses, ISIS, security issues in Canada and abroad, and Syrian refugee issues, say that this is going to be one of their marquee first bills? Why now? What is so important?

When I talk to union members, they are glad to have this piece of legislation in place to protect them. So why now does the Liberal Party want to remove it? Obviously the answer is that there were some backroom deals made between the Liberal Party and some union bosses. The reality is that we can go back to two weeks ago and the Elections Canada finding that union bosses were putting people into the Liberal campaign to make sure that he looked good for his pictures, the photo ops. They were convicted, tried, done. So why now?

Obviously there is something in that legislation that really bothers the union bosses. What would that be? What do they not like? Is it accountability? What is wrong with accountability? I have to be accountable. We all have to be accountable as members of Parliament. We have to tell our constituents what we are doing. They get to see my expenses and how I vote in public, as they should, because I am a public representative for them. Who benefits? The members do not benefit. Absolutely not. They lose all sorts of ability to see exactly what their union bosses are up to. They do not get to scrutinize the balance sheets to see what is going on. They did with our piece of legislation, but with what the Liberals are proposing they will not have that opportunity. Who benefits? It is obvious that it is the union bosses. Why do they benefit? What is their rationale behind that?

Adjournment Proceedings

The other thing in the background with the union bosses is their known support for the NDP. If we go back to the previous convention of the NDP, it was the union bosses who funded a good chunk of that convention. Again, there was no transparency there. It was not until Elections Canada became involved and it was settled out of court. We never did see how many thousands of dollars were spent on that convention by the union bosses for their NDP colleagues. Here are parties that have a vested interest in seeing this legislation go forward, both the Liberals, because of what they have done with the Prime Minister and the way the unions have been supporting them, and the NDP, because of previous actions and commitments they made to their union bosses. We can see exactly what is happening here and why there is an urgency to covering up what is going on with the unions.

My other question is about the secret ballot, which is a no-brainer. When we elect different presidents and vice-presidents for parliamentary associations, we do it by secret ballot. When the Speaker is voted into this office, it is done by secret ballot. Why would the union bosses not want a secret ballot? I have heard from different members of unions that they want the ability to intimidate the outcome of the vote. They want to be able to shame a person into voting a certain way. They want the membership to follow the party line. If someone is an NDP member, that is what they do; they follow the party line or the union line. If members are there to question it, which has happened in the past, they are not represented in a dispute with their bosses. All of a sudden the union does not show up or provide the service and support that they should be providing as their representatives.

What else is done? We have heard of intimidation tactics where unions have gone into workplaces at lunchtime and told members to vote for a party because the party is the union's party. Is that appropriate? Is that an appropriate use of their power as union bosses? A union boss is supposed to be there to represent the members of that union. If there is a dispute over a work condition or labour standard or wage, that is what union bosses are there for. They are not there to put on political activity regarding what is going on in Israel or to go to a junket in Brazil or South America to look at some labour congress issues. They are there to represent that member.

What are unions doing with that money? We do not know because we do not have transparency, and we will never know because of this legislation that the Liberals are bringing forward. It is a cover-up. First of all, the Liberals do not want the union members to understand how their money is being spent, so that the union bosses can spend it as they see fit, whether it supports the New Democratic Party or the Liberal Party.

• (1835)

The Liberals want to make sure union bosses stay in place, so they want to make sure that the secret ballot stays in place. Again, that group is tightly knit. If we look at all the options and what is going on here, there are obviously some other things going on in the background—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Prince Albert will have four and a half minutes remaining in his time when the House next resumes debate on the question.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House today to follow up on a question that I asked on January 29, 2016. At that time, I asked the current government about bilingualism and respect for the Official Languages Act. Some problems have come up recently. One of them is related to the Translation Bureau. We have been hearing more and more concerns in this regard lately. Another problem is the fact that immigrants have to pay more for language tests in French than in English.

This raises some questions, including some about the Translation Bureau. As members know, the Conservative government has a very poor track record when it comes to supporting official languages. In the past four years, 400 translation jobs have been cut. If things go on this way, another 140 jobs are expected to be lost by 2017-18, which would represent 17% of the Translation Bureau's staff. We are heading in a very worrisome direction. In addition, the Translation Bureau is contracting out more and more work, a practice that is questionable in terms of efficiency and, ultimately, the quality of the translated texts.

Unfortunately, the Liberal government did not mention its intention to change the 2015-16 plans and priorities for the Translation Bureau. That is one of my questions for my hon. colleague, the parliamentary secretary. Does he intend to change the Translation Bureau's 2015-16 plans and priorities? Unfortunately, year after year, we keep seeing more and more cuts when in fact we need a strong Translation Bureau to uphold and respect the Official Languages Act.

That being said, questions were also raised recently about the new machine translation tool that will be launched on all computers on April 1, if memory serves me correctly. This has raised a lot of questions, not only within the Translation Bureau, by the union and the employees, but also by various stakeholders who work to protect the official languages. Among others, there is Linda Cardinal, a minority languages expert at the University of Ottawa's School of Political Studies. As we know, we have a very good department at the University of Ottawa that has been doing research on official languages for a very long time. This is what Ms. Cardinal had to say about the translation tool being installed on every computer:

To me, this type of translation does not translate the spirit of the Official Languages Act, which is to promote the equal status of English and French in Canada.

Later she adds:

The purpose of this technology is to replace humans. I would say it does nothing to bring the two large linguistic communities closer together.

Adjournment Proceedings

As we can see, this is quite worrisome and the stakeholders, experts, and academics are talking about this concern. That is why I am rising again in the House to ask the parliamentary secretary what he plans to do to ensure that the official languages are respected and that French continues to be protected across Canada. That is what I would like my colleague to answer.

• (1840)

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. We had a very productive meeting this morning on a number of issues that were raised in the House today.

As a Franco-Albertan, I am very proud of our Canadian heritage and Canadian francophonie. The official languages are a wealth and heritage that Canadians are proud of. Our government intends to reinforce the importance of both our official languages. Canada benefits greatly from its diversity and its social cohesiveness.

[English]

Our government believes in the need to encourage and promote the use of official languages within Canadian society, and the development of official language minority communities is particularly close to my heart as a Franco-Albertan, and that of our government.

• (1845)

[Translation]

In order to support these fundamental values of our Canadian society, the government is committed to developing a new multi-year plan to enhance the vitality of English and French linguistic minority communities, to establish access to a free, online service for learning and maintaining French and English as a second language, to ensure that federal services are delivered in full compliance with the Official Languages Act, to modernize and restore the court challenges program, and to restore and enhance the annual funding to Radio-Canada/CBC after consulting with the broadcaster and Canada's cultural community.

[English]

Hon. members can count upon the full commitment of all ministers in this government, in this regard, in particular, the hon. Minister of Public Services and Procurement, giving full attention to the quality of linguistic tools available to the public service.

[Translation]

The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage has a mandate to develop a new multi-year official languages plan to enhance the vitality of English and French linguistic minority communities. Public consultations will be held before this plan is developed. Our approach will be based on respect, openness, and sincere collaboration with all key stakeholders.

An announcement on the upcoming consultations will be made in the next few weeks. The minister is also looking at the best ways to make online learning services more accessible so that all Canadians can develop their language skills in their second official language. Our government will provide the leadership necessary to advance

both of our official languages. That is our duty, and we take it seriously.

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, I thought the meeting this morning was very productive. It was a good open approach. It is important to work collaboratively to advance the rights of official language minorities. I am going to continue to work on that.

However, the situation at the Translation Bureau remains extremely problematic. There are medium-term action plans, but something needs to be done in the short term. We need clear answers quickly.

Here is an email that a Translation Bureau employee sent me to make me aware of the urgent need for action. It reads:

The bureau was created to serve public servants. It is not there to compete with private translation companies. Since 1995, federal government departments have been allowed to get their texts translated by anyone. They often deal with private companies that charge lower rates.... Our translations are generally more accurate and of higher quality. Obviously, that costs more. We are the experts, but many departments do not care and are choosing the cheaper options.

Does my hon. colleague intend to act quickly in the specific matter of the Translation Bureau?

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Speaker, I accept his invitation to work together because collaborating with our colleagues of all stripes is central to our government's mandate.

With respect to the Translation Bureau, it is important to work with all departments to ensure quality translation and also to ensure that the service makes sense financially. We are responsible for ensuring that Canadians in minority language communities have access to services and activities in their language.

[English]

Our government is committed to introducing a new style of leadership through open collaboration with members from both sides of the House, parliamentary committees, the civil service, and all our partners.

[Translation]

We will establish a constructive dialogue with Canadians, civil society, and all stakeholders. We are proud of these commitments, which are key to the kind of government we want. We are determined to act on them and to respect the rights of people in minority communities as well as official language rights.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for several weeks now, there has been a crisis in Quebec that affects our girls. On an almost daily basis, we hear about another girl who has disappeared from a youth centre. Our girls are being targeted not only in youth centres, but also near schools, bus stops and malls. This is a stark reminder that human trafficking is real and is happening here at home. From Laval to Jonquière, no region has been spared. Nobody is safe from this. We must do everything we can to fight sexual exploitation and human trafficking. We must take preventive action, support our girls and ensure that our law enforcement agencies have the resources they need.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Government of Canada has a role to play. It must make life more difficult for those who exploit our girls. Former MP Maria Mourani, a criminologist and sociologist, did remarkable work to move a bill against human trafficking through the House.

The bill imposes harsher punishments on exploiters. It amends the Criminal Code to achieve three objectives. First, it allows for harsher penalties for exploiters, because it imposes consecutive sentences. Exploiters convicted of several charges today are sentenced only for the most serious of the charges. Under the new legislation, those exploiters would be sentenced for all the charges. Second, the legislation makes it possible to reverse the burden of proof, placing it on the exploiters. Currently, as we heard from a police officer, it is hard to charge someone with sexual exploitation or human trafficking, because it is hard to prove and victims are often reluctant to testify. Lastly, the legislation allows for the seizure of proceeds of crime from anyone convicted of exploitation or human trafficking. This is already done in the case of drug trafficking. It only seems logical that the same sanction apply to human trafficking.

Exploiters are very familiar with the limits of the existing laws. They take advantage of the system while unscrupulously exploiting our girls. It is up to us to stand up and say, "enough is enough".

Bill C-452 was studied and passed by Parliament. All parties voted for this legislation, including the party now in power. Only an order in council is required for this legislation to take effect. That is all, it is simple, and all that is lacking is the will of the government.

Yesterday, Marjolaine Aubé, the mother of a runaway under the thumb of a pimp, who fortunately was found, gave the Prime Minister's office a letter asking him to implement Bill C-452. The letter is signed by five other parents of residents of the youth centre and is a heartfelt appeal. The parents said:

The current situation cannot be tolerated. There are real predators who are attacking young, vulnerable girls...

The broad parliamentary debate has already taken place and the law is ready. We are writing to you as Prime Minister and as a father, so that Law C-452 be applied without delay...

What does the government have to say to the parents? Will it take action to protect our girls?

• (1850)

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is closely following the situation in Quebec, where young women have disappeared. Our thoughts and prayers go out to these young women and their families.

We take human trafficking and the exploitation of women and girls very seriously. We are determined to build on the action we are taking to address this problem, so that some of the most vulnerable members of society have better protection. That is why we promised to hold an inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.

[English]

Regrettably, the recruitment of children for the purposes of sexual exploitation and human trafficking remains a serious concern. It is a tragedy when a child disappears, particularly in circumstances that suggest the possibility of exploitation. The whole country shares the

relief of parents whose daughters have been safely recovered in recent weeks. We are committed to working with provinces and territories, indigenous communities, law enforcement, and community organizations to combat exploitation and to support victims and potential victims.

While we support the principle of Bill C-452 to strengthen our criminal justice system's approach to human trafficking, there are some parts of the bill that raise concerns.

[Translation]

If the bill were to come into force, it would require that the sentence imposed on a person for the offence of trafficking in persons be served consecutively to any other punishment imposed on the person for an offence arising out of the same event.

There is a real risk that this provision could violate the charter, if applied in combination with the harsh mandatory minimum sentences established in 2014 for the offence of trafficking in persons under the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act, the former Bill C-36.

In conjunction, these two provisions, which impose mandatory sentences, could result in sentences that are disproportionate to the offence and to the justice system's approach to other offences.

This disproportion could infringe on an individual's right to protection from cruel and unusual punishment, as set out in section 12 of the charter. In other words, there is a real risk that this bill could be unconstitutional.

• (1855)

[English]

We have committed to carefully review changes to the Criminal Code brought in over the last decade, with a view to determining their compliance with the charter and consistency with our values. We take this commitment very seriously. We will, therefore, take the necessary time to review the bill to ensure that we do not enact anything that may, in the end, be found to be unconstitutional.

We will strengthen our efforts to address human trafficking, which is a complex issue that impacts on some of the most vulnerable members of our society, but we must do so responsibly, in a way that reflects our values and respects the charter. Accordingly, we are currently examining new ways to address this very important issue.

[Translation]

Ms. Karine Trudel: Mr. Speaker, we obviously want to abide by the Constitution.

However, we are in the middle of a legal debate. The Canadian bar has concerns, but the Barreau du Québec says that the law is enforceable, whereas the government's lawyers seem to say the complete opposite.

While the lawyers bicker, our girls are falling into the hands of the scum of the earth. We are doing nothing and our police forces are not getting any additional resources to help find our girls and get them out.

Adjournment Proceedings

The public is demanding concrete action. With Bill C-452, we can take action right now. Will the minister implement this legislation? All it would take is one signature, so that we can start to help instead of continuing to bicker.

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, our government is determined to take measures to better protect victims of exploitation and those at risk of exploitation.

We are also determined to ensure that traffickers properly answer for the crimes they commit against some of the most vulnerable members of our society.

We support the important objectives of Bill C-452 and we are reviewing it on a priority basis in order to determine how the

amendments it contains can be implemented. This review requires an in-depth analysis of the impacts the bill will have in relation to the charter.

Examining these important issues is a priority, but in the meantime, I would like to point out that existing criminal law provides for heavy penalties for human traffickers, including lengthy mandatory minimum sentences.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:59 p.m.)

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