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**OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)**

**Wednesday, April 29, 2009**

**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

**Private Members' Business**

**Corporate Social Responsibility and the Canadian Extractive Industry in Developing Countries**

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):**

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased this evening to rise to speak on Motion No. 283. It is a privilege to join in this discussion on an issue that has such obvious implications for Canada's reputation around the globe.

All Canadians have pride in the Canadian flag. It means a lot to us and we care about what it stands for in the world, and we want it to stand for the best of everything.

In that regard, we want our Canadian companies to adhere to the highest standards in relation to human rights and environmental matters. So my colleague from Pierrefonds—Dollard is to be commended for bringing this motion before us in the House.

When he spoke to the motion on March 9 of this year, he did so with passion, commitment and intelligence. I know many members feel that way about these matters, but his commitment to the issue is clear to those who are fortunate enough like me to be in caucus with him, as is the commitment of my colleague, the member for Scarborough—Guildwood, to these issues.

The member for Pierrefonds—Dollard noted in his comments the immensity of this task and the weighty responsibility it calls on us to assume, and it is a weighty responsibility, to examine this measure and find a response that will work effectively. He added that it is well within the capacity of Canadians, as well as in keeping with the values that best characterize this country.

Indeed I believe the issue of corporate accountability and corporate social responsibility is one that Canadians take seriously and one that the official opposition endorses.

In Nova Scotia, my province, we have a very strong mining sector. Of course, we have a history of coal mining, particularly in Cape Breton but also in Pictou County, as the Minister of National Defence would well know and as my two colleagues, the members for Cape Breton—Canso and for Sydney—Victoria could tell you more about.

Of course, that history of the coal mines is the stuff of song and legend, whether it be about coal or whether it be about mining for gold or tin. In fact, an ancestor of mine whose name was James Skerry, on my father's side, started the second gold rush, in the village of Waverley, Nova Scotia, in about 1869. So there is some history in my own family in that industry, but that was a long time ago. My grandfather, I gather, told my aunt when she asked about this history that no one ever made much money from those gold mines, even though he discovered some gold. So I guess none was left behind. No money was passed on.

I had the pleasure recently of attending a reception held in Halifax by the Nova Scotia branch of the Mining Association of Canada. They were clearly a very dedicated group of investors, innovators, prospectors and very proud business lenders. In fact, there was a fellow there who gave a demonstration of panning for gold and it was interesting to see how that really happens. It was, in fact, fascinating. I am not about to go out and start panning, myself, but I guess politics are sometimes like that. We are looking for the best things.

My impression is that they would support the intent of this motion. Most of them would be mining locally, domestically in Canada and in Nova Scotia. Of course, many of the cases we are talking about here are companies that mine elsewhere.

When the member for Pierrefonds—Dollard opened debate on this motion, he noted that, to understand the issues at play, Parliament must remember that Canada leads the world in resource extraction in developing countries. No less than 60% of mining companies concerned with these issues are Canadian.

In fact, one of my colleagues mentioned to me that he lives in the world's largest mining community, because he lives in Toronto. We do not think of Toronto as mining community, but in fact it is the headquarters of more mining companies than anywhere else. Something like over 500 mining companies are headquartered in Toronto. They are listed, in many cases, on the Toronto Stock Exchange or on the Canadian Venture Exchange and they raise their capital here in Canada. Toronto is a centre for raising capital for mining.

The mining industry is a global leader in innovation and technology in this sector and we have to make sure that Canada is also a leader in corporate social responsibility. This motion is an important part of that process.

Motion No. 283 calls for the creation of an independent ombudsman's office with the power to make sure that Canadian companies operating outside our country do so with the same degree of respect for human rights and the environment as we would expect of them in their domestic operations.

This recommendation flows from the March 29, 2007 report of the National Roundtables on Corporate Social Responsibility and the Canadian Extractive Industry in Developing Countries.

A number of years ago, the Liberal government at the time established the national roundtables and they did a wonderful job. No doubt it was a challenging job with many different points of view. I am sure it was difficult to come up with a report on which they could all agree and there were probably issues on which they could not agree.

When former prime minister Paul Martin was in power, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade established a subcommittee on human rights and international development with a mandate to examine human rights throughout the world. Developing countries would be one of the key areas the subcommittee would look at. This led to

the roundtables being put in place. Over the course of their hearings, the round tables received approximately 260 presentations, including the participation of 57 prominent Canadian and international experts.

In its March 2007 report, the advisory group brought forward a number of recommendations which promote significant measures for establishing standards for corporate social responsibility. The advisory group expressed the belief that all of the recommendations needed to be taken as a package. It discouraged the idea of cherry-picking from among those recommendations and suggested that they be taken as a whole and not one at a time. In the preface, the report states:

The recommendations in this report are the result of extensive discussions between all members of the Advisory Group. The recommendations contained in this report are intended to be read as a comprehensive package, each element building on the others.

That is an important statement for us to consider as we go through the report. I hope that my colleagues will take the time to do that, because if members are going to vote on this motion, they would want to know what the report says. However, it is true there are times when we rely on other teammates to examine some of the things we vote on because there are so many details to many of the issues that we deal with in this country, and I know that hon. colleagues would have to agree with it, whether they were keen on agreeing or not.

I think my colleagues would also agree that the establishment of an independent ombudsman as outlined in Motion No. 283 would be an important element in building a comprehensive corporate social responsibility framework for the Canadian extractive sector, particularly for those companies operating in developing countries.

Even the government has indicated that it agrees with the intent of the motion. This is a surprisingly enlightened position from our friends across the way. You are smiling, Mr. Speaker, so I think you must agree with that comment. Of course, you cannot agree because as the Deputy Speaker, you have to maintain absolute and total neutrality, and we respect that.

However, the Conservatives' lack of significant action on this file over the last two years speaks volumes about what their true position is. It is a bit like their lack of significant action on climate change. We have been hearing for three years a promise that they would bring in regulations, and there is no sign of any regulations whatsoever. Even though the six greenhouse gases were listed in June 2005 and they could have brought in regulations as soon as the following winter, they failed over that period to do that.

In view of the Conservatives' lack of interest in moving on this issue, and lack of action in general, we can see why this motion is necessary. That is why I am happy to support the efforts of my colleague from Pierrefonds—Dollard in bringing this issue to the House. Of course, I also want to express my admiration for my colleague from Scarborough—Guildwood.