



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 144 | NUMBER 111 | 2nd SESSION | 40th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

Tuesday, November 17, 2009

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

Private Members' Business

Criminal Code – S-205

The House resumed from October 22 consideration of the motion that Bill S-205, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (suicide bombings), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

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

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to take part in the debate on Bill S-205. Since this is a bill that starts with "S", it means that it began in the Senate and has arrived in this place. It was introduced in the Senate by a Liberal senator. He can be very proud of his work in the field this bill deals with, which is terrorism and justice.

Senator Grafstein introduced this bill in the other place. I understand that he will be retiring in December. I think he will be recognized for this legislation, for all the great work he has done over years and for his service to Canada. Senator Grafstein is well known by all members of this House.

Hon. John Baird: A very good member.

Hon. Geoff Regan:

Mr. Speaker, he is a very good member, as my colleague, the Minister of Transport said. I am sure the senator would appreciate that.

Senator Grafstein is also well known in this House for the fact that over the years he has worked very hard to maintain strong relations with our neighbour to the south, our strongest and greatest trading partner, the United States. Not only has he done that, but he has also advocated very strongly

and vehemently over the years on behalf of Canada with his many colleagues and friends in the American Congress and Senate. He has very good contacts there and has advocated on Canada's behalf. He has tried to influence things positively and has often done so over the years.

For instance, he pointed out to our American friends that when 9/11 occurred, none of the terrorists who took part in those actions came from Canada. This is an important point that some of our American friends unfortunately did not understand at the time.

Since they are supporting this legislation, it is clear that the NDP, the Bloc and even the Conservatives share that sentiment and recognize the value of our senators and their contributions. It is a positive sign. The fact is all parties in this House have shown their support for Bill S-205 which passed the Senate on June 10 of this year.

The Senate adopted the bill to ensure greater clarity in relation to particular measures. The Liberal Party fully supports this initiative and we support this bill. Of course, it being a private member's bill, these matters are free votes for our party, but I can say confidently that my colleagues will be supporting it.

It is a very short bill. It essentially has one key paragraph that I would like to read:

Section 83.01 of the Criminal Code is amended by adding the following after subsection (1.1):

(1.2) For greater certainty, a suicide bombing comes within paragraphs (a) and (b) of the definition "terrorist activity" in subsection (1).

Canadians probably believe that suicide bombings are already illegal under our Criminal Code, and they are right. Someone listening may ask how we would penalize a suicide bomber. If the person is successful, obviously there is no penalty that can be applied. However, suicide bombers are not always successful. What we are talking about, in part, is someone who attempts to commit a suicide bombing, or perhaps people who might try to assist or prepare that person for that event, to supply the person with materials for example. These are all relevant parts of that activity.

It is simple common sense that a suicide bombing would be considered a terrorist activity. I had a look at the definition in section 83.01 of the Criminal Code, and it is a fairly long and complicated definition of what terrorist activity is. I think it is reasonably clear, but it would not hurt at all and it is probably wise to make this absolute clarification for greater certainty.

I endorse what Senator Grafstein has done in this regard. It is no wonder that all parties in the House are supporting this bill.

My understanding is that we will be the first country in the world to take this step to clarify this matter, and it is a positive step. I look forward to the bill going to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and to its eventual passage.

Suicide bombings are horrendous, terrible acts. Who can forget watching the television on the morning of September 11, 2001?

I remember sitting in my office in Nova Scotia. The night before, I had been at a reception at what we call the World Trade and Convention Centre in Halifax. My assistant came into the room and said, "Turn on the TV. I just got a call saying that a plane has flown into the World Trade Center". I thought my assistant meant the one in Halifax. That was my first reaction since I had just been there the night before and had it in my mind. I turned the TV on and saw that it was not that at all, that it was the World Trade Center. Moments later, maybe a minute or two after turning on the television, I saw the second plane fly into the other tower.

With the first plane I thought maybe it was an accident, that it was possible there was some bizarre situation with the pilot, a mechanical problem, a problem with navigation and somehow the plane ended up flying into the building. But with the second one, everyone knew. It did not take long to

dawn on me that there was only one possible explanation, the horrible explanation that it was, and we all saw the terrible result. Even while watching the flames it did not occur to me; maybe there were structural engineers watching who recognized what would happen next, but I do not think most of us could imagine that those buildings would collapse in the horrible way they did with the tremendous loss of life that resulted.

That type of activity has never happened here. We have been fortunate in Canada. We have been spared that sort of terrorist attack, which was a successful attack certainly, but we have seen the devastation that it has caused abroad. Thousands of innocent people have died and even more have been injured.

This is truly a despicable act and we must recognize that. I hope we never experience it here, but we must recognize that there is the danger of experiencing it here. It clearly is a distorted action of depraved and distorted minds, people who are misguided and who perhaps have been brainwashed in various ways.

Let us think about the number of suicide bombings that have been carried out around the globe in the last number of years. We were all shocked by 9/11, as I mentioned. We remember the one in Madrid, which was not that long ago. In 2007 there were the London subway attacks. In 2008 there were the attacks in Mumbai, which are being recognized this week with the Prime Minister's visit there.

This bill serves to illustrate the fact that suicide bombings happen elsewhere, that they are horrible and that they could, sadly, happen here. The statistics are shocking. From 2000 to 2004, 472 known suicide bombings took place in 22 different countries. Wow. They resulted in more than 7,000 people killed and tens of thousands wounded, the horror of those actions on innocent people.

Going beyond this bill, we need to address the root causes of terrorism. I am not saying we could ever eradicate all people who might commit a terrorist act, but it is important that we work for peace to flourish, that we work to reduce the possibility, that we work to remove the fertile ground on which terror may flourish. We need to ask why it happens and what we can do to stop it.

The changes to the Criminal Code with this bill help set the stage for that kind of discussion. Senator Grafstein has done a tremendous service with this bill, as he has so often done throughout his career. It is appropriate to acknowledge his hard work for initiating this bill many years ago. It has been a while getting to this point. Because of his commitment, we are able to send a clear message to the world that this country stands firmly against terrorism.

Let me conclude with a quote from Senator Grafstein. He said in February:

Suicide bombing has become an all too frequent practice in many countries throughout the world. Thousands of civilians are killed and maimed to advance a cause based on falsely implanted expectations of glory and martyrdom. We say no cause can justify suicide bombing.