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Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

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● (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): Good afternoon, colleagues. This is meeting number 25 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, Thursday, April 17, 2008. Today we will study the Canada-China bilateral human rights dialogue.

Appearing in our first hour, as an individual, we have Charles Burton, associate professor, Department of Political Science, Brock University, who is here from St. Catharines today.

In our second hour, we will go in camera to consider the draft report, forwarded by our subcommittee, on the Canada-China bilateral human rights dialogue. I'll also mention that at the conclusion of that time, we'll have an opportunity for committee business.

We welcome Mr. Burton. As a member, I served on the Subcommittee on International Human Rights previously. Mr. Burton appeared before that subcommittee and contributed in a fairly substantive way, and his testimony was very much appreciated.

So we welcome you here today. We look forward to some of your comments. As you know, the way the committee operates, we'll have time for questions and answers following your comments.

Welcome, Mr. Burton.

Dr. Charles Burton (Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Brock University, As an Individual): Thank you very much. I'm very happy to be here at the Parliament of Canada.

As someone who has been concerned about Canada-China relations for many years, I am particularly happy to see the China question being reviewed by Parliament, which is, of course, the most authoritative institution in our political system. So I have high expectations of you, and I hope my statement will be helpful to you.

I was asked by the clerk of the committee to make a statement addressing the current situation with regard to Tibet and the Olympics, and human rights in China in general, and then to provide some background to the report I was commissioned by DFAIT to write, assessing Canada's bilateral human rights dialogue with China in 2005. This report was a central focus of your international human rights subcommittee's study between October 2006 and May 2007, as Mr. Sorenson pointed out.

As for my background in this area, while a professor at Brock University I was borrowed by the then Department of External Affairs when Mr. Chan was secretary of state, and then by the subsequent Department of Foreign Affairs to serve in the Canadian embassy in Beijing on two postings, as the post's sinologist in the political section, because I was educated in China, am fluent in the language, and have a certain amount of knowledge about that place that, I think, one might say is lacking in the government in some ways.

Now, with regard to the Chinese government's claims about the current unrest in China's Tibet Autonomous Region and in the Tibetan regions of China's Qinghai, Gansu, and Hunan provinces, they maintain in their official propaganda that the unrest is not due to Tibetan dissatisfaction with their conditions, but to western intelligence agencies and western media, in cahoots with the Dalai Lama, instigating ethnic Tibetans to revolt with a view to spoiling the 2008 Beijing Olympics, thereby causing Chinese national loss of face and thereby inhibiting China's rise to great power status.

As one can see from the demonstrations by Canadians of Chinese origin and Chinese exchange students here in Canada, I would say that many of the Han Chinese I know are individually very angry with westerners in general, because they believe the official line. There is a demonization of the west currently in China, which I think serves the Chinese Communist Party admirably in uniting the Chinese people behind the party on the basis of a nationalistic claim that the party is defending China against the onslaught of a hostile west. Because of this demonization and because the situation has led to this polarization between the views of Chinese citizens, which are typically quite nationalistic, and westerners who are concerned about the human rights of Tibetans in Tibet, it sets back the possibility of engaging the Chinese on human rights after the Olympics, because this kind of narrative suggests that western human rights engagement with China is a means to do anti-China things, to stimulate the split of the motherland.

So I think the Chinese Communist Party and the existing regime have been able to manipulate the situation in their favour, in a way that one could say is hostile to our desire to see the rule of law, democracy, and human rights become a reality for the citizens of China.

Now, we don't agree with this Chinese narrative. Canada has called for China to engage in dialogue with the Dalai Lama, and I think most of us would agree that the current unrest in Tibet is attributable to a failure of the Chinese government and their policies towards Tibet, because the Chinese government has had policies that systematically suppress the rights of Tibetans to use their language, that interfere with their right to freely practise their religion, and that interfere with their right to a distinct culture and a distinct society. The Chinese government, by limiting education in Tibet and by limiting the number of Tibetans who can enter monasteries, wants to reduce the great civilization of the Tibetan people, their historical and religious tradition, to a kind of folkloric status.

● (1540)

So the Chinese official line is that the wonderfully rich tradition of Tibetans is backward and superstitious. I've heard Chinese people refer to the Dalai Lama as “a dirty monk”.

Like all of China's 55 officially recognized minority nationalities, Tibetans are expected to play the role of a simple and happy people—happy to be Chinese who love to sing and dance. Their future is to become modern and enter into the Chinese mainstream, study Mandarin Chinese, which is more and more the language of education in the Tibetan regions, and to serve the Han Chinese-led comprehensive rise to power as modern-minded Mandarin speakers.

I would point out, as an aside, that Chinese Tibetans are scheduled to be singing and dancing at the opening ceremonies of the Olympics. I don't think most Canadians want their political leaders to share in a celebratory activity, which the opening ceremony is. It's about celebrating China's rise to power and China's arrival as a great nation in the world. It's not really about the sports. And there is no tradition, to my knowledge, of political leaders attending the opening ceremonies of Olympics.

I would say with regard to our urging the Chinese Communists to meet with the Dalai Lama, I very much doubt that any meeting of this nature will take place. Just by meeting with the Dalai Lama, the Chinese would be according recognition to and affirmation of a Tibetan identity outside of the Chinese Communist Party's control, a Tibetan identity that is not Chinese because they live in India. So I don't think this is going to happen, and I believe the Chinese government's claims that their door is open for the Dalai Lama to meet with the Beijing authorities should not be taken at face value.

Similarly, the upcoming Olympics has led to a Chinese crackdown on human rights defenders in China. The Chinese government is doing its utmost to try to keep the ugly side of their rule, the ugly realities, away from the eyes of the world. But I very much doubt that when the Olympics come in August the Chinese authorities will be successful in doing that.

Frankly, I very much regret that these Olympics are turning out to be the opposite of what was intended in terms of China's arrival as a responsible world citizen. I really wish, more than ever, that Toronto had won those Olympics—we came pretty close.

Now, where does Canada come into all of this? Our government's method of engaging the Chinese authorities on human rights through a dialogue process began 10 years ago. In April 1997, our foreign minister at the time, Lloyd Axworthy, had meetings with the Chinese foreign minister, Tang Jiaxuan, and the premier of the state council of China, Li Peng, and was told that if Canada wanted to continue the present good relations, it should not stay behind France, Germany, Italy, and Spain, which had decided not to sponsor the resolution at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva in March 1998 to call China to task over human rights.

So Mr. Axworthy decided to stop the confrontation, as he put it, by having bilateral dialogues, which he described as something like our dialogue with Cuba, and that's where it began. We held nine bilateral dialogues between July 1997 and November 2005.

In 2005, DFAIT characterized the dialogues like this. It said:

> ...the Dialogue has been used as an instrument for Canada and China to engage on human rights; a forum to share views and experience on policies and practices with respect to human rights; an avenue for both countries to express their views/concerns on each other's human rights situation and remind each other of our international obligations.

This activity was supposed to be a confidential dialogue to ensure frankness, so the contents of the dialogue were never made public but kept in internal reporting. So the press and the NGOs concerned about China's human rights situation were never given any transparent or detailed accounting of what the substance of these dialogues was.

In some ways, a minister could get up in the House of Commons when a question was asked about human rights in China and refer to the dialogue and say that these issues were raised in a confidential way, but he couldn't give you specifics. So it became a useful tool for addressing human rights concerns.

● (1545)

Also, one could not really see this as a dialogue. There was no consideration, I think, on the Canadian side that we had anything to learn from China about human rights. In other words, we hoped that the Chinese National People's Congress would learn about how a democratic parliament functioned; that was our anticipation. None of us seriously expected that any of the information from the Chinese side in the dialogue process would feed into any of our policy. The National People's Congress only meets two weeks a year; it's not something that the Canadian Parliament would likely adopt. So it's not an equal dialogue of equal exchange; it's a dialogue of us trying to show the Chinese our system, hoping that when they understood our system, they would say, this is the best system and we should adopt it.

But 10 years later, we're hard-pressed to find any objective results from the Canadian government's substantial investment of time and resources in this activity. We can't come up with any verifiable indicators of any benefit to people in China that has served the Canadian national interest in any way through 10 years of these dialogues.

Essentially, I think what was wrong was the design of the dialogue. Our dialogue counterpart was the international organizations department of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The international organizations department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a mandate to defend China's interests abroad, but the Chinese foreign ministry has no mandate to promote social justice, the rule of law, and human rights domestically in China. So we were talking to people who did not have policy-making functions on the relevant issues, but simply the function of trying to deflect the human rights concerns of the west about China. So they had no institutional interest in promoting respect for human rights domestically.

There's no evidence that any of our dialogue or discussions on these matters was reported beyond the international organizations department of the MFA. When I went and met with different Chinese ministries, like the Ministry of Propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee, the Chinese Ministry of Justice, the Chinese Bureau of Prison Administration, the Chinese police, and so on, and the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, they had not received information about the dialogues beyond their participants who were there. The senior policy-makers at the higher levels of the Chinese Communist Party, who have decision-making authority over such matters, have evidently had no involvement with the human rights dialogues to date.

When I met with the people in the Chinese government and the Communist Party who were involved in the dialogues, they told me this. First of all, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not consult with them about what agenda items would be useful to them in their ongoing work. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs simply advises these ministries, like the Ministry of Justice or the police or the Ministry of Health, about AIDS and so on. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs would advise them of the topics and ask them to research the Canadian situation in these areas and prepare questions and observations about Canadian human rights shortcomings, so they would have a chance to talk.

Much of the dialogue—and this is the other thing they told me, and which I personally observed, as I've probably attended more of these dialogues than any other Canadian—is taken up by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' people reading scripts prepared for them by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, whose content was well known to all of us and of very little interest. So a lot of the time in the dialogue was taken up by their talking about things we already knew. The topics of discussion tended to repeat the issues already raised, such as the UN covenants, which came up time and time again, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The Chinese generally found the Canadian presentations and discussions to be too shallow to be of substantive benefit. For example, in the 2005 dialogue, which I attended in Ottawa, the RCMP played a PowerPoint presentation that they use for new RCMP recruits on the topic of the appropriate use of violence. The senior members of the Chinese Ministry of Justice and the Chinese police—not to speak of the representative of the All-China Women's Federation— I don't think found the presentation to be of any value to them, frankly.

Also, the dialogues only involve a small number of Chinese people, and there's no mechanism to spread the information beyond this small group.

And Canada only provided information in English and French; we didn't provide anything in a language the Chinese could read.

● (1550)

Since the late 1990s, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has engaged in annual government-to-government bilateral human dialogues with at least 11 western nations, as well as with the EU and Japan. The purpose is to allow western governments to engage in quiet diplomacy with a view to encouraging the Chinese regime to come into compliance with UN-determined human rights and norms. They've had more than 200 of these dialogues, with largely the same Chinese cast of characters attending substantial numbers of them. There's no evidence that they've had any significant impact on any Chinese governments, agencies, policies, or practices, and in fact the Chinese say explicitly that Chinese citizens already enjoy the full protection of human rights. Mr. Yang Jiechi said that to Condoleezza Rice just last month. So they don't feel that they need to know things.

In the meantime, there are significant issues of concern to us. Freedom of association is a big one. The NGO sector is very limited in China. They don't have independent political parties. The migrant workers have no protection of workers' associations. There is no free press. There is no independent and impartial judiciary.

This does lead to problems such as the Lai Changxing case, where a Chinese gentleman who is accused of evading $19.8 billion U.S. in customs duty through a massive smuggling operation is currently living comfortably in Vancouver, associating with suspected members of a Chinese triad called the Big Circle Boys and able to purchase new automobiles. We have no means of returning him to China to be accountable for any crimes he may have committed there because the rules of evidence in Canada and China are not the same. Foreign nationals enjoy the protection of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Due to the incompatibility of our systems, Chinese criminals can come here and they're home free.

Finally, I would say that the current Australian Prime Minister is a fluent speaker of Mandarin, a trend that I hope to encourage in Prime Ministers. He made a speech at Beijing University, where he talked about the nature of friendship in the Mandarin language. He is not a Conservative Prime Minister, but I think policy with China transcends partisan concerns.

He says that in China friendship in some ways contains a sort of emotional blackmail: to be a friend with Chinese you should hold your tongue and be polite. When things are going on that you disagree with, you should say nothing publicly, but you do have the possibility of a small cautionary word in private, which is readily ignored by your Chinese friend. Mr. Rudd said, “A strong relationship, and a true friendship, are built on the ability to engage in direct, frank, and ongoing dialogue about our fundamental interests and future visions.”

So I feel that Canada gains more respect in China by being open and honest in our interaction with the Chinese government. Of course we should be respectful. Of course we should listen to them with due consideration. But if we are silent when we hear reports of human rights abuses, this can be misinterpreted by our Chinese friends as tacit complicity in these Chinese policies and practices that many Canadians find deeply disturbing. I think that even in diplomacy, honesty is the best policy.

Thank you.

● (1555)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Burton.

We'll go to the first round of questioning.

Mr. Chan.

Hon. Raymond Chan (Richmond, Lib.): Welcome to the committee, Charles. It's nice to see you again.

I have a report from the foreign affairs department today that was passed on to us by the committee secretariat. They claim that China has made significant human rights progress in recent years. Would you agree with that? If you agree with it, can you elaborate and share with us what you think are the improvements they have made in the last recent years?

Dr. Charles Burton: In terms of food security, the Chinese population has grown by three times since the regime came in and the amount of arable land has actually been reduced due to desertification and urbanization, yet we estimate that the number of people living in absolute poverty in China—those who have trouble getting enough to eat and having enough energy to keep their bodies warm and clothed—is now down to about 80 million, whereas it used to be 300 million in a smaller population. So that's a significant accomplishment.

In terms of democracy, the Chinese say, "We will have democracy, but conditions don't allow us to have it now." They've been saying this for a long time. I've been involved in hearing this kind of discussion for 30 years now—I'm 53, in another 30 years I'll be dead—and I'm skeptical of the idea that they have the intention to move to democracy but can't do it quickly. When the Leninist system ended in eastern Europe, it seemed many of those places were able to implement democracy in relatively short order, so I don't buy the idea that democracy is impossible in China.

In terms of progress, there is no institutional progress. There is progress in the sense that in the private sphere you don't have to worry anymore. When I lived in China in the 1970s, if one made a comment of a political nature to friends, it was quite possible that the friends would report it and one would end up in prison. Now you can say things privately, but in terms of substantive protection for human rights or any of the UN freedoms, I frankly don't see it.

Hon. Raymond Chan: How about the mobility rights? You can move from city to city or from a village to a city. How about the freedom to choose a career now instead of being appointed by the government? You don't have to apply for a marriage licence now. Are those the kinds of freedoms that they talk about in foreign affairs? Those are individual freedoms, right?

Dr. Charles Burton: Frankly, I don't—

Hon. Raymond Chan: The other thing I wanted to ask you—

Dr. Charles Burton: To respond to those points and the freedom to move from place to place, I'd mention that there still is a registration system in existence, and people who move into the cities don't have the right to register there. They're lacking membership in that city. They're basically temporarily in the city; it's not as if people have the freedom to move where they wish.

Certainly in the market system one can choose one's career, whereas in the past it was assigned. That's got to be progress.

But within China, due to the Chinese Communist Party's policies, when they abandoned Marxism and this planning of the economy, they also seem to have abandoned the commitment to social justice. You're seeing China going from what was one of the most egalitarian distributions of wealth when China was poor to being what is, I think, the second most inegalitarian distribution of wealth now that China's rich.

So for the underclass there isn't a lot of good news. What we see in Beijing and Shanghai is not representative.

Hon. Raymond Chan: Aren't you contradicting yourself when you say there are many more people being fed now, but the poor are not seeing any good news?

The other thing I want to put on record, Mr. Chairman, is that I agree there are serious human rights problems in China, but at the same time, I think they are making some progress.

The other thing is that I was a little bit ticked off that when I asked if there was significant improvement in human rights, the first thing you pointed out was that people are getting fed. To me, that has nothing to do with human rights. Being fed is a natural right, but it's human rights that we're talking about.

● (1600)

Dr. Charles Burton: I think the latter falls into economic, social, and cultural rights with regard to the responsibility of governments to provide basic conditions for their citizens through the transfer of social resources, but I agree that it's different from civil and political rights.

Hon. Raymond Chan: Do I have more time?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.)): Yes, you have two minutes more.

Hon. Raymond Chan: When you say there are 56 minority groups in China, do you regard those visible minority groups as part of the Chinese? Do you regard them as Chinese?

Dr. Charles Burton: The Chinese government has trouble with the concept of citizenship. We would regard them as citizens of the People's Republic of China, but then when our citizen Huseyin Celil attempted to get consular protection, the Chinese government wouldn't recognize citizenship.

The 55 minorities are 10% of the population, so the attitude of the government towards them is ambiguous. If they—

Hon. Raymond Chan: It's the first time I've heard that the Chinese government doesn't recognize these 56 minorities as Chinese citizens. Are you sure?

Dr. Charles Burton: They don't like to use the word “citizen”. I think that's true, but I think that certainly they would say they're “Chinese (Tibetan)”, with a bracket, or “Chinese (Mongolian)”.

Hon. Raymond Chan: But even Han Chinese men from my village are still Chinese from Tai Shan.

Dr. Charles Burton: Sure.

Hon. Raymond Chan: But they're not singling out the minority to be different.

I asked that because if we recognize those minority groups in China as Chinese citizens and recognize Tibet as part of China, then Tibetans are part of the Chinese people. Why do you have a problem having their perform in the opening ceremony? And then you go on and say that Tibetans are not Chinese. How do you justify that?

Dr. Charles Burton: The performance of the Tibetans in the opening ceremony, I believe, is a belittling of their culture if you only identify Tibetans as singing and dancing. I've been to Tibet and I never saw anybody singing and dancing. I saw them praying.

And when the Chinese government has been removing pictures of the Dalai Lama that are very precious to these monks and throwing them on the ground in the temple courtyards and wanting the monks to denounce the Dalai Lama as a beast, I feel this is an outrage against their culture.

Hon. Raymond Chan: We can have a lot of opinions about how Chinese treat the Tibetan Chinese. But at the same time, I just can't see how anyone, particularly you.... When you recognize minority groups in China as Chinese citizens and Tibet is part of China, how can you then say that Tibetans are not Chinese?

This is why a lot of the students and a lot of the Chinese immigrants are complaining to me, as a Chinese Canadian, about how the public media and the academics and so on keep separating Tibet and China, and at the same time the official position is that Tibet is part of China. They feel very strongly.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bernard Patry): Just quickly.

Dr. Charles Burton: If there was a self-identification...if you asked someone of Tibetan heritage in Canada who they are, very few of them would say, “I am a Chinese”; they would say, “I'm a Tibetan Canadian”.

Hon. Raymond Chan: I respect that, but I'm talking about those Tibetans in China.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Bernard Patry): Thank you, Mr. Chan.

We will now go to Ms. Bourgeois.

Hon. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good day, Mr. Burton.

Mr. Charles Burton: Good day.

[*English*]

It's nice to see you again. We just met last night.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Bourgeois: For my colleagues' information, yesterday I attended a conference given by Mr. Burton at the University of Ottawa. His presentation was very warmly received.

I find myself listening to you again this afternoon and I could sit here for hours because your stories are so very interesting. Your knowledge of China is extremely valuable, especially in this day and age. As a member of the Canada-Tibet Committee, I am leaving tomorrow for Michigan where I will be conveying Canada's support for his Holiness the Dalai Lama.

You noted that all of the bilateral meetings that had taken place between 1997 and 2005 had not produced the hoped-for results. One of the reasons is the understanding of dialogue entails.

Did I understand you correctly?

● (1605)

[*English*]

Dr. Charles Burton: I think that from the Canadian point of view we hope to have results.

When I was working in the Canadian embassy in 1998, I was very optimistic about these dialogues. I thought this was great, that once the Chinese knew about democracy and human rights they would want that for themselves and we'd help them to make the institutional changes. I had good feelings. But as the dialogues went on year after year and we were getting nowhere, and the people we were meeting were defending the Chinese status quo, I began to realize that this activity was not working out the way we had hoped.

I think that from that point of view, seeing as this hasn't been working well, we want to use our resources in ways that will bring about good results. So we should wind this up and try other methods of encouraging democracy and human rights in China.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Bourgeois: From what I see, Canada has very strong trade relations with China and adequate diplomatic relations. Through CIDA programming, Canada provides aid to China on the ground. I sense that each component is compartmentalized, rather than combined with other components, which could open up relations with China.

Would I be wrong to say that every aspect is compartmentalized at this point?

[*English*]

Dr. Charles Burton: Well, I think the Chinese authorities would certainly like to keep human rights in a separate compartment and away from other aspects of the relationship.

It is troubling when one sees recently retired members of government engaging in business with Chinese Communist business networks and becoming suddenly quite wealthy. You wonder if there's any connection between their former activities in government and their subsequent wealth when they leave government, but one isn't privy to how those dynamics work.

I do think that in our relationship with China we should be looking at an all-of-government approach. Parliament is responsible for all of government, so I think it's incumbent on Parliament to be directing the government and the ministries in how to coordinate a Canadian approach to China that doesn't have this perceived conflict between social issues and trade issues. I don't think our government's speaking out on human rights has had any impact on our trade; our share of the Chinese market has been declining throughout the years of the Liberal government. It wasn't as if it was since the new government came in. We've had this problem of losing market share during the period of quiet diplomacy. In recent times we're doing a bit better, but I think it's due to commodity prices going up.

In China our government, in my view, has generally not been as effective as those of Australia, Britain, and the United States, because there are issues in the way we've been approaching China that have not been doing the best that could be done for Canada.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Bourgeois: When we meet with witnesses like yourself, we try and look at Rights & Democracy. Human Rights Watch and Rights & Democracy are two organizations that you are familiar with and that you work with.

In a 2005 report on Canada's bilateral human rights dialogue with China, Rights & Democracy stated that any attempt to evaluate this dialogue must also take into account the relationship between bilateral dialogue and other diplomatic, trade and development strategies. The report also points to the importance of considering other solutions, if bilateral dialogue fails to achieve stated human rights objectives.

The solution advocated was the development of a genuine foreign affairs policy. Canada does not have such a policy.

How do you feel about that?

[*English*]

Dr. Charles Burton: With regard to the dialogue, if the Chinese want to continue in this way, we could say we'll consider talking about the dialogue when you allow international observers into Tibet. Louise Arbour asked to go there and was turned down. That's one thing.

We do have a strategic partnership with China at the deputy minister level, and I would like to see the human rights issue become integrated into this strategic partnership and not left aside. Why do we have a strategic partnership in those issues while we're doing human rights in a separate process?

● (1610)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Bourgeois: You said we had strategic partnerships. The human rights dialogue is a separate process not included in these strategic partnerships.

Is that in fact what you are saying?

[*English*]

Dr. Charles Burton: In fact, yes, that's right.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Bourgeois: Thank you very much.

You have just knocked me for a loop!

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Bourgeois. We'll now move to the government side, and Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Thank you, monsieur.

First of all, I would like to correct my friend on the other side. We are not here to beat on China; we are here to discuss how best we can work there in China. We do have concerns with China, about human rights in reference to its treatment of its minorities, whether there are 53 or not.

About this question of whether they're Chinese or not, it is for the Chinese people and the government to decide how they want to treat their minorities. It's not for Canada to decide that. It's like we have the French Canadians over here and how we treat our minorities. So saying this would be a little bit going off track.

You're absolutely right that the manifestation of what is happening with the Tibetan protest and everything else is just one of the internal affairs of what is happening in China and how they're treating it. My friend over there was secretary of state for many years, doing this dialogue, which is what he does, and I agreed with him when he said there were a lot of human rights issues that we need to address. And that's what we are talking about here.

Nobody is talking about China's economic strength. Nobody is talking about China having done remarkably well and taken its people out.... It's an emerging economy that everybody is engaged in. But we cannot close our eyes to other Canadian values that we hold very strongly. This manifestation of this Tibetan protest is about how China is treating itself. If they did it more....

You have rightly pointed out about human rights, frankly speaking, that it has failed during the regime of this government. The reason it has failed is that we have taken a soft approach. At a given time, I was with Prime Minister Martin in China. I think you were there with me too. The Chinese were just totally blank, and said, “Don't talk about human rights here, period.”

The question I have is, what changes in society will occur in China in reference to a very vibrant Chinese community living in Taiwan, with the same language and everything, which is absolutely free with a tremendous amount of cultural freedom and religious freedom and which is a 1,000-year-old Chinese civilization? You can see that happening in Taiwan. You can see it happening in Hong Kong, if you want to go to Hong Kong.

Then you jump over to Beijing, and boom, everything is controlled. Yet there are these two countries, whether you want to call them countries, territories, or whatever—eventually it'll be decided. Its influence of that society and to a major degree influence by Chinese Canadians out here....

How much more quickly can this work on the current Chinese system out here to enable those changes to take place within China? We can stand outside, as we've done and as I think you've rightly said, but within China, how quickly can the change occur? How quickly would the big war around Tiananmen Square, or whatever...? How quickly can that be done, considering it's an emerging market? What's your view on that?

Dr. Charles Burton: I'd say, first of all, in terms of our diplomacy with China, we have relations with the People's Republic of China, the government in Beijing, and we recognize all the territory that they control. There's some territory that they're not in control of, such as some offshore islands that they claim, and also Taiwan, which is one of these classic ethnic conflicts where you have two interpretations of history over the same piece of territory.

The Taiwanese education system says that Taiwan has never been a part of China. It was only temporarily under Chinese rule over a short period, but it was a Japanese colony and left alone and so on. The Chinese government is absolutely firm that Taiwan is a province of China and part of China's sacred continent.

Tibet is a similar situation. There are competing interpretations of the Tibetan history as to whether the Chinese are acting, in effect, in a colonial situation there or whether Tibet has always been part of China.

My own view is that Canada should not have an opinion on this. Mr. Bernier did make a statement referring to a one-China policy in a speech to the Asian heads of mission a couple of weeks ago, which he then repeated in answering a question in the House of Commons. The next day the New China News Agency issued a press release applauding our policy. As far as I know, China does not have a one-Canada policy.

These matters are within the domestic jurisdiction. We deal with the people who are in control of the territory, but I don't think it's appropriate for us to have an opinion as to the exact status of Taiwan or the exact status of claims of people about Tibet or about Mongolia or about whether it's Xinjiang or Turkestan. These are domestic affairs that are not within Canada's rights as a diplomatic partner to.... It would be interference in their domestic affairs if we came out strongly one way or the other.

But we can hold them to human rights, because we're all signatory to the same human rights covenants and expect that the Chinese government will respect them the same way as Canada does. We both give up some sovereignty when we subscribe to international agreements.

In terms of the pace of change in China, right now there's no alternative to the existing Communist Party to assume power there. There's no opposition. There's no Solidarity, as there was in Poland. There's no equivalent to what happened in the Czech Republic. The Chinese Communist Party is really, one might say, the only game in town. So I expect that the only thing that will lead to real effective change in China will be either a crisis or the perception of a crisis that the situation is about to lead to fragmentation of the state.

I think we should be engaging China on human rights. I think there should be a judicious balance between engagement and speaking out honestly about our concerns. But ultimately, the political situation in China will be determined by Chinese people, not by Canadians somehow directing change in that country.

● (1615)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Do you see any change brewing in China?

Dr. Charles Burton: I used to think that as the economy developed and as you got a rising middle class who owned property, they would want to have the right to participate in political decisions affecting their property. This is a normal political science idea. But what you're seeing in China, it seems to me, is nothing like this. The middle class appears to have been co-opted by the power and business, the Chinese Community Party, and maybe they realize that if there was effective democratic change in China and the vast majority of the population were empowered with democratic rights of citizenship and a notice of entitlement to rights, this would affect their privileged position.

So it seems the situation in China is quite stable, but there are a lot of people underneath who are feeling unhappy and not seeing the benefits of the amazing economic transformation reaching them in a meaningful way. As those people gradually become more enriched, I expect they will become more and more dissatisfied with the existing political arrangements, and one could see people's movements forming. But I don't see any indication of this in any foreseeable future, frankly, I'm sorry to say.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Burton.

We'll move to Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you.

And thank you to Mr. Burton for coming on fairly short notice. I appreciate your being here today.

Where to start? I want to start with the idea of democracy and its evolution. I know that at the local level they have this kind of process for open recommendation and selection. There actually have been cases where non-Communist Party representatives have been recommended and selected. When you read the literature, they'll say that there is development and democracy here. Yet when you actually look at the evidence, to say that it's a groundswell and there's a trend to move to multi-party and to other levels of governance, it doesn't seem to be the case.

So on the one hand you could say—and I know the Chinese will say this— fine, how long have we been around, and how long did it take to formulate and have democracy evolve in the United States, or for that matter in Canada? Take the example of women having the vote here in Canada, or of aboriginal people—there are many arguments they can throw.

What I'd like to know from you is where the possibilities are in terms of supporting, in any constructive way, democratic development in China. Maybe it's not possible. I find it interesting that on the one hand—and I think we all do it—people will point the finger at China and say they're not doing this, this, and this. Yet we're all entirely complicit if you look at trade. Presently, if you look at most of the debt that the United States has, there wouldn't have to be a war between China and the United States: they would just have to call their debt. It's interesting to observe that on the one hand, when it's convenient, we can say that they're not observing human rights and not supporting democratic development. On the other hand, we're happy to truck and trade with them because it benefits us in some way.

Within that interesting dichotomy, how do we, or can we, support democratic development? At the grassroots level I've suggested there's non-Communist Party selection. Anyone could say that's a good thing. Are there ways we can actually support democratic development in China today?

● (1620)

Dr. Charles Burton: I think there are. Certainly I was a big fan of the village elections when they came out 10 years ago. I thought this was going to empower people with a sense of citizenship and then they'd start electing at higher levels, and by about 2008 we'd have a democratic system in China. It turns out, as with most of my predictions about Chinese politics over the past 30 years, that I was wrong again. The village elections stopped at the village level, and the effective power was still in the hands of the non-elected Chinese Communist Party secretary. It's not very meaningful and hasn't led to citizenship.

But we do have important programs: CIDA, the civil society program, which is supposed to assist the development of the NGO sector in China. It's difficult to do, because most NGOs in China don't have proper legal status. We can do these programs like trying to train Chinese judges, developing a sense of transnational identity for professionals, so that the police want to do policing in accordance with international standards, so they don't see themselves just as Chinese police but see themselves as modern police who have colleagues in many countries. There are a lot of areas in which we can try to do a bit of value-added to promote human rights.

I don't like the parliamentary exchange, frankly, because the National People's Congress is not anything like the Parliament of Canada. When you go there, in effect you're establishing a sort of moral equivalence: we're all parliamentarians together; you have a different kind of parliament from ours. I think we should be careful in activities that provide some credibility to Chinese institutions that don't really deserve it.

Mr. Paul Dewar: This is actually a fairly recent—January, February 2008—*Foreign Affairs* article, mostly dedicated to China, by John L. Thornton on what's happening in China in terms of democratic development.

In his article, he cites an article that was written, and he finds it interesting that this was actually in a periodical that was supported by the party, and that was widely read. The title is "Democracy is a Good Thing". As he says here, it "caused a small sensation in China." It got around. The author was Yu Keping, who is the head of a think tank. He says here that, "Yu was forthright and specific in his approval" of the concept of democracy, and he quotes: "Among all the political systems that have been invented and implemented, democracy is the one with the least number of flaws. That is to say, relatively speaking, democracy is the best political system for humankind." I'm not sure we would have seen that distributed widely 20 years ago.

So my question is again on the engagement. I know there are exchanges among academics. In fact, a friend of mine who is here at the University of Ottawa recently had an exchange of a professor from China here with him and he's going there.

Talking about the judiciary—I know it's cited here as well that there are concerns—have we engaged in the past in programs that have had our judicial experts go to China and engage in any programs? If so, are we still doing that, to your knowledge?

● (1625)

Dr. Charles Burton: When I was working in the Canadian embassy, I remember welcoming the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to China, and she spoke to senior judges there. We have a senior judges training program. I don't think it worked out quite as we'd hoped. A lot of those judges ceased to become judges and sought refugee status in Canada or joined Canadian law firms.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Where was it?

Dr. Charles Burton: The program was at the University of Montreal. I've been involved in a program at the Central Party School in Beijing. It's their main think tank for the party. I find that the colleagues I'm interacting with fully support the idea of separation of powers and the rule of law. They recognize this as the best system. But they also recognize that they can't have it in China, because it would undercut the existing rule of the party.

These people are supposed to be providing legitimation for Marxism under market economies in the 21st century. The party would like them to come up with some convincing explanation as to why they're legitimately in charge of the People's Republic of China. They haven't been able to do that. They admire our system, but then they realize that they can't have it in China. I see a sort of tension there between their aspiration and the hard realities of power that currently exist there.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Burton and Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Thank you for coming here today, Mr. Burton.

I guess the first comment I would make is that it would be difficult to compare China's democratic development with eastern Europe, considering China's population of 1.5 billion people and a cultural history of some 5,000 years. I'm more concerned with the report.

You and the report touched on a bit of China's international involvement and what types of excesses, or how much they tolerate or facilitate human rights abuses, certainly in Africa, with Darfur, but there are other areas too. I mention one country, Guyana, where it's more exploitation of resources. The exploitation of resources is that they actually go in and set up a complete forestation plant to harvest the forestry, as well as a port. It's hard to imagine. The workers are all Chinese, and it's completely built by Chinese. It would be very difficult to be able to see what the value is to the country, and of course there are the human rights of the Chinese workers who are working there too.

Are there are other areas globally that could be mentioned or could be suggested where China is equally exploiting resources and impacting on the human rights of the people from the various countries too?

Dr. Charles Burton: Yes. But I would say with regard to your first question that I'm a graduate of Fudan University in the history of ancient Chinese thought program, the philosophy program. As Mr. Obhrai pointed out, Taiwan is a Chinese place; it has a democratic system. Singapore is another place with a dominance of Han Chinese people, and it also has democratic system. So I don't think there's any incompatibility between the universal values of human rights and anything in Chinese culture. I think I can speak with some authority on that question because of my background.

With regard to Chinese support for ugly regimes, they provide energy and food inputs to the North Korean regime just sufficient to sustain it, because China doesn't want a reunited and democratic Korea on its borders.

Another country on China's borders that China supports quite strongly and that also has a very ugly regime would be Burma. I think it's a similar sort of logic: other countries aren't prepared to do things with Burma because of our repugnance over the nature of the system there, and China is able to go into a vacuum.

● (1630)

Mr. Peter Goldring: Could I get your comments on how China treats international decision-making—in other words, on their concern, particularly in Caribbean countries and other countries around the world, about getting support for votes at the United Nations? They seem to be obtaining this type of support by gifting various countries with various things, from schools to hospitals and other buildings, but in return soliciting their support in the United Nations for the country votes.

Dr. Charles Burton: I think that's true. They're all over Africa. Mr. Mugabe's residence recently had a nice Chinese roof put on it. They gave him a doctorate from a Chinese institution. We don't like Mr. Mugabe all that much, I don't think, but they do.

Returning a bit to what Mr. Dewar was saying, my concern would be that the Chinese believe they're having a comprehensive rise to power. The United States is overextended in debt, much of it held by the Chinese, and weakened by military ventures—and this is the Chinese interpretation.

China's economic rise will also have cultural and political implications. If China becomes a very dominant power in the world, will they start to reinterpret the norms of international behaviour? Will they be good global citizens and maintain the norms of the WTO and all the UN agreements in a way that Canada would favour? Or will China use its power to reinterpret things to China's interest, but against the interests of people in other countries and weaker countries?

Mr. Peter Goldring: [*Inaudible—Editor*]...government support, then, would be a whole-of-government approach that would be critical of human rights within China, as well as of the excesses that China might be influencing internationally in its foreign affairs.

Dr. Charles Burton: I hear you, but I think we should be positive and engage the Chinese in a positive way and a respectful way, but in an honest way. We have to engage China because it's so important, but I wouldn't like the Chinese to think that Canada wants to hold them back or try to influence their sovereignty.

I think we need to put a positive spin on how Canada can engage in China in ways that will be to Canada's national interest and to the overall benefit of the global community. I think there are ways to do this, but right now our policy is pretty outmoded and hasn't been renovated for a long time. This is where I see a role for Parliament, in terms of deciding that it's time for us to do things differently with China in a way that will serve Canadian interests much better.

The Chair: Thank you.

I just want to let the committee know my intentions here. We were to go into our in camera draft document report now, but I think my intention is that we will continue with this for the time being. We have probably Canada's predominant expert on China-Canada relations here with us right now. I'll give everyone the opportunity to have a question. I know there are a few who still have questions.

Mr. Burton, do you have time to stay with us?

Dr. Charles Burton: I would be happy to stay.

The Chair: Wonderful. Thank you.

I'm going to go back to Mr. Chan.

I'll also caution the committee. It's been very good so far, but because we are considering and will be considering a draft China report, make certain not to make any quotes or any reference to that report. It's still confidential.

Mr. Chan.

Hon. Raymond Chan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I will say that I started my political career as a human rights activist. It feels difficult to be defending the Chinese government on their human rights record, and I don't want to. But at the same time, with the approach we've been taking.... I was Secretary of State (Asia-Pacific) from 1993 to 2000—that's seven years—and the Liberal government continued governing until 2006. In all of those years, I think the engagement approach that we had on human rights and on all the different fronts with China has been very productive. I would say that, yes, there continue to be a lot of human rights problems, political problems, corruption problems, social disparity problems that we have to help them with, that we have to work with them to overcome. At the same time, I think that if we move away from the engagement approach that we've been taking, it will be a wrong decision.

In 1991 I risked my life and led an international delegation to China. I sneaked in there. I was detained for five hours and I was asked to leave. After I came back from China, I decided that the problem of human rights in China is not only a problem with the government. Replacing that government, replacing that leadership, would not bring human rights and would not bring democracy to China. We have to start from the grassroots. We have to start with the people. This is why engagement works.

During the 12 or 13 years of the Liberal regime, yes, we did not use human rights as a political showcase, but every time I had a bilateral meeting with China, I raised human rights. When I came out of those meetings and went into press conferences, I talked about human rights. I'm the first minister from a western democracy who ever visited Tibet, and I met with the dissident lamas in Tibet. At the same time, we raised those issues all the time. I just want to put that record straight.

The other thing is that with those kinds of dialogues between the two countries, we support a lot of NGOs locally, and the universities, to work with China, and it's the work of our legal experts with the judicial administration in China that has been able to convince the Government of China to implement the presumption of innocence in the legal system. It's a major change in their approach of dealing with judicial reform.

Also, if you go to China now, on the TV there will be a lot of government programs to educate civilians about their rights, and how not to go with Kwan Si to resolve a case. Also, on the radio, there are phone lines people can call to complain to local officials about what went wrong.

Jonathan Manthorpe, who is the Asia-Pacific reporter for the *Vancouver Sun*, recently, just two weeks ago, wrote an article about the more than 130,000 NGOs, civic societies, that are now operating inside China. Those 130,000 civic societies have a lot of impact on the lives of the citizens inside China.

He cited one big example of how, in Fujian province, they were to build a chemical plant close to an urban centre; and how the citizens of that city used the telephone for short messages and were able to amass over 110,000 people to walk on the bank of the river in the form of a protest; and how the representatives in the people's congress and in the people's consultative assembly from that city were able to make the government change their decision. Now they will try to build the plant somewhere else. Now the people in that new location are trying to do the same thing.

● (1635)

What I'm trying to say, Mr. Chairman, is that the engagement is working. There are still a lot of challenges in China, but we should not turn our back on the very successful approach that we are conducting right now.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chan, for that glowing report.

I think I should give Mr. Burton the opportunity. Mr. Chan took up all the time for that round, but I think it's only a courtesy.

Dr. Charles Burton: I'll be brief.

I don't think anyone is suggesting that we shouldn't engage the Chinese. It's really a question of what sort of engagement, and if our past mechanisms of engagement through their foreign ministry have not been yielding results, then I think we have to look at a smarter engagement in ways that will achieve results.

It's not a political issue; it's an objective issue. I don't feel we should continue with a dialogue that is not bearing fruit. I think that our engagement should be honest and transparent, and I don't think our engagement should be in exchange for giving them a free ride in the UN system. We can engage them multilaterally through the UN. We can engage them bilaterally through new and effective programs that will bring about good Canadian results.

I wouldn't want to be misunderstood. I don't think we should be shunning China or refusing to meet with them. I think we have to look at the policies and do policies that actually deliver the results, and not have a going-through-the motions dialogue—we have a dialogue, but actually it doesn't lead to anything. That's the gist of my report. It's not about shunning the Chinese or not engaging them. I believe we should be engaging them a lot more.

● (1640)

The Chair: Mr. Lebel.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Lebel (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Burton, for joining us.

I know you said that your projections about China have not always been accurate in recent years, but I still would like you to gaze into your crystal ball.

When I arrived in Radisson in the Northern Quebec municipality of James Bay, the site of Quebec's hydroelectric jewel, I was surprised to see three flags flying in front of my hotel: the Quebec flag, the Canadian flag, and the Chinese flag. I was very impressed and the following thought came to mind. We export Canadian and Quebec technology that is used to build dams, even dams in China. China will be able to build dams and to produce cheaper hydro-electric power. As a result, aluminum plants around the world will close, among other things.

The Three Gorges dam is the largest hydro-electric project under construction in the world. I know that we are getting close to the subject of raw materials. Aluminum is not just a matter of energy. Salaries account for 15% of the costs associated with producing aluminum. The issues here are hydro-electricity and energy.

Based on your knowledge of China, what do you see in store for this country in terms of hydro-electric development and the ever-closer relationship between the aluminum industry and the forestry industry, for example? Wood is harvested in Russia, cut into pieces on boats and the waste is then thrown overboard.

I would also like to hear your views on the environment, but you are likely going to run short on time.

What do you see in store for China's industry, primarily in terms of its hydro-electric industry?

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lebel.

Dr. Charles Burton: Well, I think the bottom line is, regardless of how we engage China on social issues, if we have the best product at the best price, the Chinese are going to buy it from us. So it's a question of understanding the market clearly, producing products that are suited to the Chinese conditions, and taking the Chinese conditions seriously, as this company in northern Quebec evidently is.

As China becomes wealthier, of course, because they eat more meat, the price of grain is going up, and that's good for our wheat sales; and they need more Saskatchewan potash because they're fertilizing their fields better; and they need more Canadian wood pulp and more wood products. We're able to provide these things, and if we're competitive in higher-tech areas, they'll also buy Canadian products.

With regard to the pollution question, it's an unfortunate reality that as a country becomes wealthier, as it increases its economic activity, it consumes more energy. This is unavoidable. It's just a law of economics.

So Canada has two priorities in our engagement with China in development. The first is good governance—democratic development and human rights. The second is environmental sustainability. I think we really should be holding the Chinese to maintain international standards of environmental protection, and this includes international agreements such as Kyoto-like agreements, because China, I think, will shortly be producing more carbon pollutants than the United States, and it will continue more so. Of course it's a huge issue.

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Lebel.

Madame Bourgeois.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Bourgeois: I will be sharing my time with Ms. Deschamps.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry.

Madame Deschamps.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): You have trouble recognizing me, Mr. Chairman. You will get used to it.

Good day, Mr. Burton. It was a pleasure listening to your very interesting and highly enlightening presentation.

China has suffered a great deal over the past few centuries. Earlier, you stated that Canada and other nations must be open, honest and very respectful in their dialogue with China.

I have a very timely question for you. How can China deny that it engages in any form of repression today? Torture is commonplace and the following problems have been noted: extensive use of the death penalty; repression of journalists and internet users; repression of people campaigning against HIV-AIDS, union activists and human rights advocates; restrictions on freedom of religion; forced evictions on the eve of the Beijing Olympic Games; violence against women, and the list goes on.

Clearly, we should be very concerned about this state of affairs.

● (1645)

[*English*]

Dr. Charles Burton: Yes, I agree. One area that I admired in your committee's report on democratic development was the possibility of including more NGO input into government information about China. With respect to these issues that you talk about—the AIDS issue; the violence against women issue, which is a serious and growing issue in China; and the repression issue, and so on—there are a lot of Canadians, particularly Canadians of Chinese origin, who have a lot of expertise in these areas, but currently our Department of Foreign Affairs doesn't have any mechanism for getting genuine input from these people. Unlike the Americans, who provide funding for NGOs and commission them to do studies to provide information into the government policy-making process, Canada doesn't provide support for this resource.

I think it's a resource that we should be making more use of, because those people usually have Chinese language skills, strong people-to-people connections inside China, and they have the capacity to recommend to government policies that could in fact address our concerns in these areas. At present, we're just not drawing on Canadian resources that do exist, and I wish we would be developing mechanisms to do more of that.

Chinese is the third most spoken language in Canada, but when I visit the Canadian embassy in China, there are very few diplomats who are familiar with the Chinese language. They can't read a newspaper. They can't pick up the phone and call their counterpart. I'm puzzled as to why that's the case.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: If what you say is true, Mr. Burton, then this should be part of Canada's foreign policy.

[*English*]

Dr. Charles Burton: Do I think we should have a different kind of policy? I like your democratic development report, and I like the idea of developing a Canadian institute for democracy that would focus on these areas, bringing in all the elements of our society—separate, at arm's-length relationship from government agencies. I think this is an exciting idea that really could allow Canada to be a much more effective player in promoting values.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Thank you.

Hon. Diane Bourgeois: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dewar, did you have another question?

Mr. Paul Dewar: I actually wanted to ask our guest something.

A couple of questions ago you ended where I was hoping you wouldn't, and that was on some of the changes you would like to see. You were just touching on them, I think, because you're definitely of the school of engagement, constructively. I'm getting a picture here that instead of our doing it just at the lead level, at the top level, you'd like to see us really look at engaging at a more grassroots level, but it needs to be structured and framed. We can't just send people off and tell them to improve relations.

So I have an open-ended question to you. Could you give us some ideas about what Canada's policy should be, to change what it has been in the past?

Dr. Charles Burton: My observation is that Canada engages China too much with the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and that's not a powerful agency in China. They speak English, so it's easy for our diplomats to contact through that ministry. But the senior-level Communists I've had some contact with—because I went to university in China and I know a lot of people in the higher levels of that party in Beijing—regard the Chinese foreign ministry as interpreters. They don't see them as being in the policy-making area.

I don't want to be too critical about things I'm not familiar with, but it seems to me that we could have handled the Huseyin Celil case differently if we'd been engaging the people who actually had authority over this case, rather than trying to work through a ministry that I don't think has the power to bring about effective change.

So I agree with you. I think we should be engaging Chinese at all levels, not just at the government level but at the people-to-people level. I think we also ought to be engaging the Chinese system.

When Canada functions in the United States, in Washington, we don't just engage at their Department of State. We engage their Congress; we engage the President; we engage all the elements of political power in the United States, because we decided a long time ago, under Mr. Gotlieb, that was the most effective way to function in Washington. We need to have a similar sort of approach to China, because China is a very important place to us, and we could be doing it better.

● (1650)

Mr. Paul Dewar: There's one point about which I couldn't agree with you more. We have at least a million Chinese-speaking Canadians, and it is puzzling that we don't have more people in the foreign service abroad who can speak Chinese, never mind people who can actually engage on trade and develop our markets abroad. So I think that point is well taken, certainly for me.

Thank you.

Dr. Charles Burton: Our foreign ministry tends to rotate people—they have one posting in China, and then they don't go back there during their whole career—whereas in other foreign ministries, it's a detail; they circulate people in Chinese-speaking places. So they'd have a career that would be the capital, Beijing, as well as Shanghai, their office in Hong Kong, and maybe Taiwan and Singapore. But they could build their careers on this expertise. I think in our ministry it would be a disadvantage to career building if you just focused on the China area. They want to be consul general in Pittsburgh and deputy director of personnel, and maybe go back to China at some stage.

I think we need to be building more expertise to deal with a challenging and complicated place that requires expertise. Dealing in China in English or French is just not going to work anymore.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Lastly, are we doing enough in our post-secondary institutions to develop that kind of talent?

Dr. Charles Burton: That's an interesting point. My university, Brock University, has over 1,000 students, out of our 17,000 student population, who are self-funded from the People's Republic of China. We're not sending 1,000 students to China to study. So they seem to be taking advantage of us; we don't seem to be taking advantage of them as much.

It's a question of choice, but I wish more Canadians would go into the China field, because I think there's a lot of potential there for young people to really develop very productive careers. But I have a bias on this question.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Burton.

Madame Bourgeois.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Bourgeois: Mr. Chairman, I would just like to attempt to draw a parallel between the comments of Mr. Chan and Mr. Burton.

If I understand correctly, Mr. Chan spoke from the heart in an effort to have us understand that China's Communist and repressive government does not reflect the Chinese people. I have read a lot on China. The Chinese are opened and informed, but have to contend with a host of problems. They lack the confidence needed to move forward and make changes within the government and the Communist Party.

Mr. Burton told the committee that change could be achieved gradually through a series of small gestures and through a comprehensive policy. I understand that this is the message being conveyed by students in China.

While you did say that some judges have requested asylum in Canada, others have chosen to remain in China and to demand change.

I would like us to get something positive out of all this. China might appear to some to be a scary beast—and it likely will become one in a few years' time—, but all is not lost provided we take action on different fronts. We will not effect real change simply by visiting China from time to time and engaging in a dialogue. Only by taking a series of steps will we succeed in getting China to move forward and open up to the world.

Would you agree with me?

● (1655)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Burton.

Dr. Charles Burton: I agree with you. You're right, we should be doing a comprehensive, integrated approach to China, using everything that we have in Canada to try to engage that country in the most effective way. It will pay off for us. We put a lot of money into our relationship with China. I'm not proposing a massive increase in funding allocation; it's simply a matter of drawing on resources that we have, but in more effective ways.

China has changed enormously over the past 20 years, but a lot of our Canadian policies have lagged behind. Other countries have brought in more effective programming, and I think we should look to those nations and draw on the vast experience that, say, Australia and Britain have in engaging China and see if this would work for us.

You always want to be catching up and making sure we're keeping up with the trends of the times. There's a certain stagnant nature in bureaucracy that people like you need to shake up and say, “Things aren't going the way they should; review your programming and reallocate that money in ways that will better realize Canadian interests in the country.” I'm happy to hear you share this kind of idea.

The Chair: Mr. Goldring, did you want to speak? No.

I have a couple of very quick questions.

First of all, you did mention the Huseyin Celil case and that perhaps we could have handled that a little differently, or governments could have handled that differently right from the get-go.

They have denied consular services. They have not allowed us an opportunity to speak with him. They've gone against every international right of at least being able to question Celil. What specifically would we then do differently, just protest the fact that we haven't had consular service? What could we have done differently?

Secondly, we've talked about the lack of a lot of different freedoms—no freedom of expression or association, some of those that have been hampered or stifled—but on the freedom of religion, there is the obvious one in Tibet right now with the monks. There are other ones with the Muslims. It seems to me, because I sat on that committee, there is a Muslim group called Uighurs and also the Christian church. There are probably a lot of other religions there. But I remember seeing a program or a documentary on China just walking in and ripping down a church that people had been worshipping in or meeting in.

What can we do? What should be done? Is it just another place to protest, maybe at the UN?

I noted in the document our clerk circulated today that the human rights records of both Canada and China are scheduled for universal periodic review by the UNHRC in 2009. Is this the only stage for us to voice some of these concerns? Is there an opportunity here in 2009? Should we wait until then? What specifically can be done, especially in the freedom of religion area?

Dr. Charles Burton: With regard to the Celil case, I wouldn't want to second-guess.... But when I was in Beijing working with the central committee party school, I took advantage of my time to go to the international liaison department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, which is an important foreign policy institution in China. They said that they were very happy to see me, and that they were surprised no one from the Canadian embassy had been to see them for some years. I think Mr. Gordon Houlden has met with them subsequently. We should have contact with these kinds of places, because this is where real policy and real power lies.

With regard to the religion question, they have a state administration for religious affairs that periodically comes to meet with their Canadian counterparts. Well, what is the Canadian counterpart for the state administration for religious affairs? We don't have one, because the government is not deciding what a legitimate religion is or what a cult is and so on.

In general with regard to this question, the Protestant Church is increasing exponentially in China, with over one million new converts a year. More people attend religious services in China on any given Sunday morning than in all of Europe. It has been progressing well. You have to register your religion in China, and the party is bringing more diverse forms of worship into the legal religions. I think the Chinese are coming around to the idea that believers in religion make good citizens, and I think they're less and less repressive of religious beliefs.

That is the situation with Protestants. There are problems with the Catholics, because the Chinese government refuses to acknowledge the role of the Pope. They want God to deal directly with someone inside the boundaries of the People's Republic of China as opposed to the Vatican. That means that most of the Catholics in China are illegal. It varies from time to time and place to place, but people are still able to worship and make their spiritual connection with their Creator.

The situation for the Uighurs is desperate. It's similar to that of the Tibetans. The Chinese government doesn't want to acknowledge that these people have a distinctive language, culture, and history. They speak a language that is intelligible to modern Turkish, and the Chinese government is concerned that in their religious practices in the mosques they're also engaging in the creation of a separate identity. So they have a lot to be concerned about.

Of course we're going to try our best in the Human Rights Council in 2009. It's a new institution. It is as yet untested. We're not sure how it's going to go. In the meantime, I think we have to try to shed light on the situation in China.

The Chinese government is amenable to exposure of wrongdoing. A few years ago when the CTV crew passed a Shanghai police station by coincidence and observed the torture of a prisoner—a prisoner being beaten up and manacled to a window frame—the Chinese government felt ashamed about this. They never say they think torture is okay, that it has served their tradition well for generations, that it's a cultural thing, and so on. They know that there are certain human bottom lines. And in terms of the freedom of religion, I think it's the same.

I think it's incumbent on Canada to not let these things go unanswered. When we become aware of situations, we should speak to our Chinese friends and say, "We've heard about this and we don't think it's right. Don't you think you should be considering doing things differently?" We hope they would agree with us. Why Amnesty International and letters to the Chinese president urging the release of somebody seem to have an impact is a mystery to me, but evidently even the senior leaders of the Chinese Communist Party have some consideration about what Canadians in Saskatoon or Moose Jaw or Grande Prairie think about how they're treating their people. And they do respond.

I do think that shedding some light on these things in a bilateral relationship is a healthy thing. Then we can operate with more authority, in concert with other countries in the UN, to do the same thing.

● (1700)

The Chair: Thank you.

I noted earlier, though, you stated that what the Chinese hope happens is that you would never speak out against it on the stage, but you would rather deal with it one on one, personally; and then when you do that, they don't listen anyway. That's the frustration we can have in taking that approach.

Dr. Charles Burton: That's why I think we should be honest and transparent in public. The quiet diplomacy route doesn't seem to have worked the way we'd hoped.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Burton.

We're going to suspend for a couple of moments to allow you to leave the chair. We will then go in camera and very briefly take a look at the China report.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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