

*Supply*

have some doubts about that, Mr. Speaker. I have grave doubts about it.

I have some doubt as well about the relevancy of this debate today. As a matter of fact I have been asking myself as I have sat here watching the events unfold today whether all of this was redundant. If the purpose of the motion put down by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) was to continue the Opposition's pressure on the Government and the former Minister of Regional Economic Expansion with a view to bringing about his resignation, then the statement of the former Minister at eleven o'clock today made that whole procedure redundant because the Minister has in fact resigned.

I am sure we could have rearranged our business to conduct ourselves in a way that we could address some of the other issues that have been neglected over the past week. Again, if the purpose of the pressure was to determine whether there was a serious breach of the conflict of interest guidelines, and if that was one of the objectives of bringing about this debate today, then I say the objective has been achieved, not only by the resignation of the Minister but by the very dignified manner of his resignation. He stood in his place in this House at eleven o'clock before we commenced the debate, the subject matter of which concerned his alleged conduct and whether he had violated the guidelines, and announced his resignation to the House. At the same time he called upon the Government to initiate an inquiry so that his name might be cleared. We have the Minister's resignation. We have the inquiry. What then, Sir, is the nature of this exercise? Why are we continuing to pursue this debate?

I have heard some questions raised critically with respect to the new rules of the House and whether they were able to meet the occasion of the day, whether they were able to rise to the challenges presented to us by the House in this issue. I suggest to you, Sir, and to the House that the new rules, and especially the new committee system, which is less than five weeks old, is able to cope with any situation that arises from time to time. We are still in the supply period. The Estimates are still before the standing committees of the House. The Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition, under the new rules, has the discretion to designate and hold up the Estimates of any one Department beyond the end of the supply period. All these things are there for the Opposition to use.

● (1520)

I presume that the Estimates of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs are before the Standing Committee on Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Surely there was the vehicle whereby the conflict of interest guidelines could be directly addressed by examination of the Minister of that Department in his capacity as Registrar General, or of the department official known as the Assistant Deputy Registrar General. Surely it could have been pursued there, and it still can. There is no end to the opportunities the new committee system affords the House. That makes it very difficult for the

House to justify having its agenda consist of one single issue for up to two weeks.

I heard the suggestion that the Opposition Parties tried to get this matter before two committees, the Standing Committee on Regional Industrial Expansion where the former Minister was defending his Estimates, or the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure. I do not know what went on in the first committee, but I know what went on after the chairman adjourned the hearing because I saw it on television. The entire country saw the spectacle of Members of this House chasing a Minister out of the room, pursuing him with questions after the meeting had concluded. There was not one of us who saw that on television who was not embarrassed. I have never seen anything like it in my time here.

I have not had a chance to read the proceedings of that particular committee. I do not know whether the rulings of the chairman were pertinent and relevant to the rulings made by Your Honour in the House. Indeed, committees are independent in that regard. However, without having been present or examining the record I know the conduct in the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure was, in my view, proper and correct.

Under the rules of the House that committee has a very narrow mandate. It can only examine the rules and Standing Orders of the House. Any other matters have to be referred to it by the House. Rightly so. Obviously, you cannot have a committee of the House initiating privilege procedures. Only the House can deal with privilege. It can deal with it in any way it deems fit. One of the ways it normally deals with privilege, if the Chair rules there is a *prima facie* case, is to refer it to the committee. Were it to be any other way we could not really conduct ourselves in a proper and orderly manner in this place. Privilege is a sacred part of this place where it affects the rights each of us have as Members of this House.

Insofar as the Code of Conduct is concerned, the difficulty is that it is not a statute of this House. Consequently, it cannot properly be before a parliamentary committee other than when examining the custodian of the Code, in this case the Deputy Registrar General, or the Registrar General himself in the person of the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Côté).

The Leader of the Opposition said in his speech today, and I do not quarrel with the statement, that the burden of proof is on the Minister to conduct himself in a manner above reproach. That is the burden carried by every Member of this House who is called upon to be a Minister of the Crown. However, I also say to you, Sir, that there is a responsibility which goes beyond those who are called upon to be Members of Cabinet. There is a burden upon each and every one of us to conduct ourselves in this House in a manner which will not bring disgrace upon us or embarrassment on the country. I suggest to you that there have been times over the last few days, both during Question Period and in committees of the House, when some of us have hung our heads in shame over