

Government Orders

With regard to lobbyists and Bill C-22, I would like to refer to some aspects of Bill C-44, an act respecting registration of lobbyists, which was sanctioned on September 13, 1988 and which came into effect on September 30, 1989. It was the first act of that type ever to come into effect. The act was amended by Bill C-76, which was passed on February 22, 1993, but it never came into effect. Rather strange, is it not?

Regulations were adopted under power given by Bill C-44, but they only deal with procedural issues, undoubtedly important but raising few substantive questions.

What is the purpose of the act on lobbyists? It is based on several fundamental principles, among which are:

The public has the right to make its views known and to have free access to the government. That is the principle of accessibility. Activities with the government should be clear and open, and the system should be easy to manage.

A standing committee has been struck to study, in particular, this whole issue of lobbyists and released, in 1993, a ninth report on the registration of lobbyists.

I would like to discuss a few points of this report, because there is an obvious link with Bill C-22, and this link is the lack of openness. For example, it is reported that many witnesses acknowledged that lobbyists were playing a role in effective policy development and improving communications with government decision makers. They are said to be an essential part of a modern decision making process. Nevertheless, lobbying is as old as the hills.

However, and according to me, that is the heart of the problem. It is reported too that when lobbying is conducted without the public knowing anything about it, there is greater opportunity for decisions to undermine the public interest.

The purpose of the act respecting the registration of lobbyists, Bill C-44, was to create a system for paid lobbyists to register with a public office holder. Lobbyists were to be divided into two categories, tier I, or "professional" lobbyists, and tier II, or "other" lobbyists.

Each category was to have its own set of reporting rules. However, let us simply say that those rules are not the same for each category. There are two sets of rules.

I do not intend to explain to this House all the elements of this complex act. We will have an opportunity to come back to those if the government fulfils its commitment to implement the report of the standing committee which reviews the Lobbyists Registration Act. For now, I will just raise a few problems related to this act and establish a link with Bill C-22.

As regards registration and subject matter disclosure requirements, Bill C-44 provides that tier II lobbyists, the other

lobbyists, only have to give their name and the name of their employer. The standing committee argues that by doing so, one cannot discern all the matters of interest to an organization. It recommends that the disclosure requirements for all lobbyists be made uniform.

Thus, let us try to know why lobbyists got involved in the privatization of Pearson airport. That cannot be done without a thorough and independent inquiry.

• (1205)

Furthermore, the committee feels that the current method of facilitating subject-matter disclosure is clearly unsatisfactory and fails to meet the needs of office holders, lobbyists, and, most importantly, the Canadian public.

Finally, the report on the lobbying industry recommends that the Act contain a general anti-avoidance provision to encompass abusive or artificial schemes designed to circumvent the registration provisions. The committee also recommends that a professional association with an industry-wide code of ethics be established.

Should not this government nominate an independent adviser whose mission would be to write a code of ethics for lobbyists? What is this government waiting for? Is it waiting for Bill C-22 to be passed?

In his report on the Pearson review deal, Mr. Nixon himself, notes that the role of the lobbyists exceeded the permissible norms. That's where the shoe pinches. The whole issue of the transparency of lobbyists' work and power is again questioned.

Like my colleagues from the Bloc, I subscribe to the recommendations contained in the standing committee's report on the Review of the Lobbyists Registration Act because I feel that a number of lobbyists exceed the permissible norms and do not abide by the law. Only an independent inquiry commission will be able to prove it.

Regarding the funding of the political parties, I would like to quote some numbers. My colleagues mentioned the generous contributions of our friends from the banks. But more generally, if one considers the contributions made to the federal political parties in 1992, at the corporate level, the Progressive Conservative Party received \$6.7 million and the Liberal Party \$3.5 million. At the individual level, the Progressive Conservative Party received \$4.7 million and the Liberal Party \$4 million. Which means that 58.9 per cent of the \$11.5 million contributed to the Progressive Conservative Party and 46.7 per cent of the \$7.5 million contributed to the Liberal Party came from the corporate sector.

Surely, one can assume there will be an increase in the contributions made by businesses to the Liberal Party, now that they are in office.