

community are involved that this situation is going to improve.

I support the member for Mississauga South. I certainly support my colleague from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell who has developed a beautiful substantial paper on ethics in government where we finally get at the lobbying system in this country. There cannot be a member of Parliament in this House who does not support the fact that we need some renewal on the Lobbyists Registration Act. Well, let us get it done. Let us get it done before we go to the street.

I am sure many members on all sides agree it is time to bite the bullet because the issue of trust in this country has reached a crisis proportion. However, it is not just a job for those of us working in this Chamber; it is also a job for the Canadian people to get involved in the political process.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Forestry): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to what the hon. member said in his concluding remarks about this having gone on long enough and that it was time to do something this year and make some changes. He may wish to recall that in 1973, the government at the time published a green paper on conflict of interest. The President of the Privy Council was Allan MacEachen. The green paper gave a definition of conflict of interest that was not included when Bill C-62, an act respecting the independence of Parliament, was tabled in June 1978. The bill lapsed when the session ended on October 10, 1978.

On October 16, 1978 the government came back with another bill, Bill C-6. This bill died on the Order Paper on March 26, 1979 upon the dissolution of Parliament. It was not until May 1, 1980 that the new Liberal government, elected in 1980, tabled rules of conduct similar to those tabled on August 1, 1979. However they did not apply explicitly to spouses and dependent children. Until 1985 we had a code of ethics drawn up by the Liberal government in power at the time. In 1985 the government, through the Prime Minister, tabled a code of ethics for ministers and parliamentary secretaries.

Supply

I would like the hon. member to understand that the committee of which I was a member worked extremely hard to improve the existing code of ethics. Bill C-43 was referred to us after first reading. We heard a number of witnesses, but my point is—and that is what I would like the hon. member to understand—that we did not point an accusing finger at anyone. We made a fundamental distinction. As the hon. member said, and I know he was not referring to anyone in particular, perception is extremely important. There is a tremendous difference between breach of trust and fraud which are covered by the Criminal Code, and a potential conflict of interest, whether real or apparent. That is covered by the code of ethics. Our experience has been that, except in one case, conflict of interest cases did not get beyond the initial stage and in other cases, charges were dropped. As for criminal charges—this is a comment, and if the hon. member would care to listen I will be brief—in some cases these were dismissed because of lack of evidence.

Perhaps the hon. member would like to consider the following in connection with the report by the joint committee. If the government decides to go ahead and table a bill is the hon. member prepared to work together with members of all three political parties on introducing a new code of ethics that reflects the current issues and the needs of all members?

• (1800)

[*English*]

Mr. Mills: Mr. Speaker, the short answer to that question is absolutely yes. All of us on this side of the House will work with the government on this particular issue. I also want to say, going back to the 1970s and before, that I am not condoning that period. We probably could have and should have done a better job.

However, there is something totally different going on today. There is a lobby industry in this country that we all know is now in excess of \$100 million a year, which is more than the total of the incomes of all of us in this place. They are working on public policy in and around us. Many of us do not even know what is going on.

As we approach this reform we are talking about we have to make sure we get it right once and for all.