

clear—and I think the Minister of Labour has overlooked this—that the government definitely acknowledged its responsibility in this matter when it discharged its former employees. I believe that the Department of Veterans Affairs are attempting to be fair, but when they went so far as to have representations from these different organizations come to them they did know that there was a transaction taking place that was not in the interests of the veterans. When the government has so persistently advocated that all veterans should accept the services and advice of the D.V.A. and act on their advice and thereby avoid these pitfalls which are now apparent, the government definitely recognized the dangers that lay ahead.

In this particular case it is clear to anyone who has listened to the facts presented tonight that the government did recognize that they were involved and, once having recognized their responsibility, they cannot lightly brush this whole thing aside by discharging an employee or two. If everybody is to have his day in court, as the Minister of Labour has suggested, the fair thing to have done was not to discharge those men. That was not fair, according to the interpretation of the Minister of Labour. These men should have had their day in court—

Mr. MITCHELL: If I may interrupt my hon. friend, I do not know whether he is conversant with the civil service regulation that if a civil servant wants to engage in activities for gain outside his regular office hours he has to have the permission of his minister. These people did not, and so they were out.

Mr. JOHNSTON: As I understood the brief presented by hon. members to my right, the transaction began in office hours, and meetings were called while the department was employing these men.

Mr. MITCHELL: Under the regulation governing civil servants, an employee cannot work out of office hours for monetary return without the permission of the minister. If he does, he is out. That is all. He does not have to do anything wrong necessarily.

Mr. KNOWLES: But this took place in office hours.

Mr. JOHNSTON: The minister is not implying, is he, that the Department of Veterans Affairs discharges a man if he has not done something wrong. If that is the attitude of the department, my opinion of the department is lower.

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Mr. MACKENZIE: May I interrupt my hon. friend? I think it would be in the interests of the whole house to refer this matter to the public accounts committee, finish this debate, and get on with the business of the house.

Mr. JOHNSTON: I am coming to that. I have it here in my notes.

The second place where the government recognized their responsibility—and I am of the opinion that they did recognize their responsibility—was when they asked the R.C.M.P. to investigate. I take it that the department asked the R.C.M.P. to investigate this matter while Mr. Ferland and Mr. Levesque were still in the employ of the department. If that is so, they definitely recognized their responsibility there, believing that these veterans were being defrauded. Then, having taken the advice of the R.C.M.P., to whose report they had access but of course we have not, they discharged these employees, thereby endeavouring to wash their hands of the whole affair. That does not seem to me to be the proper way to deal with a situation of this kind.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs has suggested that this whole matter be referred to the public accounts committee. I am not sure whether I agree with that suggestion. I have been on the public accounts committee for a number of years, but in this case it seems to me that the government has a direct responsibility and that it should not be shifted on to a parliamentary committee—

Mr. MACKENZIE: I rise to a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I submit that this whole discussion is out of order because the case is *sub judice*. I have made the suggestion that this case be referred to the public accounts committee, and that suggestion has not been accepted by the hon. member for Bow River (Mr. Johnston). I raise the point of order that this discussion is out of order.

Mr. JOHNSTON: Surely every speaker is not out of order just because he disagrees with the minister. That would be a new rule if that were so. I did not say I was absolutely opposed to having this matter referred to the public accounts committee. I was objecting to its being referred to the committee at this time, because that would be an excellent way for the government to get out from under its responsibility in this matter by shifting it to a parliamentary committee.

Mr. MITCHELL: Let us have some decency in this discussion. Do not forget that there are veterans on both sides of the house. My hon. friend has suggested switching this matter