

absolutely foolish remarks I just heard in this House. Even in this House, what are we not forced to hear when this Parliament is supposed to set the pace and to direct the nation in the way of progress. The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield), in his interpretation and application of conflict of interest with regard to ministers or members of parliament, expresses a concept absolutely obsolete and even reactionary of society and women in society, a concept by which two persons, because they are married together, are tied up as if they were not two separate entities with their own freedom.

This concept, Mr. Speaker, does not take into account the new dimension of the role of today's women and their desire to enjoy all the rights of a citizen. I think we could reasonably acknowledge the right of women to follow their career until their complete fulfilment. If we acknowledge this right of a woman, we should do the same for her spouse. So, Mr. Speaker, one person should not be held responsible for the other. Two married persons have their own identity and they must have the opportunity to pursue their own activities.

Do the hon. Leader of the Opposition and even the Leader of the New Democratic Party think that women are not full-fledged citizens and that they cannot have an activity as such? If a woman happens to be appointed minister of the Crown, do they think that her husband should be penalized and inhibited in his own career? This is the conclusion one comes to on the basis of the interpretation given by the hon. members to the concept of conflict of interest. According to the proposed legislation, the minister will have to declare his holdings. I entirely agree that a minister should not have interests which might lead to conflict in his high office but it does not mean that we should impose the same obligation to his spouse.

Is not a woman, if married, free to carry out any sort of business transactions, even without her husband knowing it? Why should a minister of the Crown not assume her responsibilities in such a way as not to involve her husband in her activities?

For instance, should a woman whose husband is a member of parliament be excluded from the public service either at the provincial or federal level of government?

Times have changed, Mr. Speaker, and women must be allowed to take up careers. I fully agree, Mr. Speaker, that it is not possible to regulate everything, and this green paper certainly tries to establish rules for those who assume public office.

But it is not possible, as the Leader of the Opposition will have it, to assimilate a wife to her husband or even to her under age children. And this is why, Mr. Speaker, I am surprised by the remarks I hear in this House. The Leader of the Opposition keeps referring us to the Napoleonic Code which has been amended so many times already. I am also surprised to see the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald) agree that members of her party assimilate the conflict of interests to the choice of a person to take up a career. If I were she, I should be ashamed to sit in the House with people and with a leader so mesmerized by the concepts of Caesar's wife, a base cliché, Mr. Speaker, that led to the enslavement of women we heard about. One cannot codify everything, Mr. Speaker, I agree. But ministers of the Crown take an oath, first

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to keep secret the facts they become acquainted with in their duties and, second, to make their decisions in the best interest of the Canadian people.

Unless the contrary has been proven, Mr. Speaker, benefit of the doubt must be given the minister having public responsibilities. It is impossible to claim that somebody has betrayed his or her oath unless supporting proof is simultaneously offered and no one can imply that that somebody is not faithful to his or her oath.

However, I completely agree that since one cannot codify everything and considering the really privileged relation existing between a man and a woman and within a family, persons in such circumstances acquire a very high sense of ethics and that must be left to everybody's conscience. As a matter of fact, it is one of this society's problems to insist or codifying everything without relying at the same time on values that make people act in such or such a way. That is a basic truth, a guiding principle in life that normally derives from the whole field of human activity. The most perfect system cannot work if trust does not exist. There must at least be some faith in people's honesty. This has always been our society's moral foundation. I agree that we should codify wherever it is possible but conscience exists and it rouses me to indignation to see that hon. members opposite have not thought about it in this discussion which is precisely related to the basic values in life.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that if I say I am indignant at the very materialistic way those people approach the matter of conflicts of interest without giving due consideration to conscience, it is not sufficient and it will not appreciably change the situation. But at least, Mr. Speaker, hon. members will know exactly what stuff I am made of.

I for one, Mr. Speaker, and I know that hon. members on this side do as I do—try to develop the very high sense of ethics that will enable me, as the only woman sitting in this Cabinet, to be a pioneer in the way which will be opened to women by the fight I am engaged in.

[English]

**Miss Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands):** Mr. Speaker, I was very interested in the remarks of the Minister of the Environment (Mrs. Sauvé). What she obviously fails to grasp, and what members on the other side of the House fail to grasp, is that this debate deals with principles which touch upon the very foundations of order in our society. It raises, first, the question of the principles of good conduct and moral responsibility on the part of elected representatives. In the reference we have before us there is recognition that such principles do in fact exist. The problem lies in the fact that the government is unwilling to take the strong, affirmative action that is needed to ensure that these principles are honoured at every level, particularly with regard to the executive.

● (1720)

The second fundamental question which this debate raises is that of public confidence and trust in government. A study carried out in Canada in 1968 discovered that more than one-third of Canadians were skeptical about the integrity of public officials and a substantial number considered public officials to be dishonest. There