

*Supply*

If the Government had anything to say in its defence, surely the time to do it was when these allegations were made by responsible people in the media. Instead, Parliament was stifled and the Government adopted a cynical strategy—a media strategy—of saying as little as possible on the record.

I hold the Prime Minister accountable for that because he started it. As he was leaving the country he said that the Deputy Registrar General was responsible. Later in that interview he talked about the presumption of innocence, as if we were talking about the Criminal Code rather than conflict of interest guidelines which were his responsibility to administer. Those conflict of interest guidelines are not the responsibility of the Opposition or the Assistant Deputy Registrar General, but the responsibility of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister had the nerve to say that there is a presumption of innocence.

The Prime Minister has a blind spot about morality which prevented him from taking the necessary steps at the beginning of this matter. The Prime Minister should have taken immediate action, as was the case in the situation of the Minister of Communications (Mr. Masse), who stepped aside, either on his own or at the suggestion of the Government, until he was cleared of certain allegations. In this case, no effort was made to challenge allegations. The Government has lived with those allegations. I do not believe that an inquiry will change the fundamental facts which have been put to the Government frequently and not challenged. An inquiry will not change the obvious interpretations of the provisions of the conflict of interest guidelines which we say are violated by the behaviour of the Minister's wife.

I have dealt with the responsibility of the Prime Minister for letting this situation get out of hand. I also want to look at the responsibility of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Nielsen) during the mandate of the Government. Time after time, he has defended the indefensible and then backed away from his position. For instance, he defended the former Minister of National Defence. He said that his behaviour was perfectly acceptable, that there was nothing wrong with his behaviour. The former Minister of National Defence then had to resign.

The Deputy Prime Minister said there was nothing wrong with the behaviour of the former Minister of Fisheries and challenged the Opposition to make a charge. He suddenly changed his tune and we saw the former Minister of Fisheries depart.

During the Hatfield matter, we repeatedly stated our belief that the former Solicitor General was wrong and had violated the conflict of interest guidelines by trying to help or give the appearance of trying to help a friend. He was defended by the Deputy Prime Minister until the day he had to leave that portfolio.

The Deputy Prime Minister claimed there was nothing wrong with the former Minister of the Environment's trip to Europe, and if Members wanted to make a charge they could

do so. Suddenly, the former Minister of the Environment was gone.

The Deputy Prime Minister defended his own behaviour in bugging the Liberal caucus many years ago. He said there was nothing the matter with that and there were many good arguments in favour of it. He challenged Members to make a charge if they wish to do so. Suddenly, we received a form of apology, indicating that that type of behaviour is considered reprehensible by the Government and would not be repeated.

I do not believe that the Deputy Prime Minister can continue to perform that function. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence is discredited by the way he has acted as the Government's trustee of proper behaviour of Ministers. He cannot continue to perform that job with any credibility.

Let me conclude with a reflection that came to me over the weekend. I believe it is a realization that has come to all Members as they went to their ridings over the weekend. What do Canadians think about this behaviour that has been revealed and not denied by the Minister? Canadians think that politicians are involved in politics only for what they can gain and that their purpose in serving public office is to try to benefit themselves. Businesses are also under a cloud as a result of the manner in which the Government has handled this matter. Canadians out there are thinking that if a business gets ahead, if it is doing anything which involves the Government, there is some element of influence peddling behind it. Both those propositions are wrong. It is up to the Government to restore standards in which Canadians will have confidence. This is not the Philippines, nor is it Korea. Yet the attitude the Government takes towards conflict of interest guidelines gives the Canadian people the feeling there is just no difference. It is appalling and I welcome the opportunity in today's debate to try to make that clear to Canadians and to force the Government to assume its responsibilities in this matter.

• (1250)

**Mr. Blenkarn:** Mr. Speaker, I have a comment first and then a question. When a Member of Parliament says he obtained no benefit, when he makes that flat declaration, it would seem to me it is the obligation of his colleagues to accept his word at face value. Otherwise, we tear ourselves apart as Members of Parliament, we tear this place apart, we hurt the representative system and we call into disrepute Members of Parliament generally. If we are going to have Members of Parliament involved in key economic portfolios, we have to have Members of Parliament in those positions who have been there before, who have borrowed large sums of money from banks and know what the "street" is all about.

**Mr. Nunziata:** Boloney!

**Mr. Blenkarn:** It would seem the only kinds of persons we should ever have in those portfolios, with the kind of attitude expressed by the opposition, would be people who have no business experience, or have made no outright effort in the