

Government Orders

Where there is smoke there is fire and the smokescreen that surrounds this thing is starting to get thicker and thicker. Might there be a possibility that there are prominent Liberals and others we do not even know about who are directly or indirectly involved in this and will be entitled to some compensation?

In order to keep the public interest on centre stage and to take the political favours off the scene altogether the minister should not be making these decisions about compensation. The decisions should be made in public on a non-partisan basis by the Standing Committee on Transport in which all members of all political parties can have a say and invite witnesses to come before it.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Strahl: This is where everything related to the deal will be made public. If real economic losses have been suffered by innocent parties the committee will make a joint decision in front of the television cameras, in front of the Canadian people to show that no political influence peddling has been involved.

The Reform Party does not believe that it is cost effective to go to the length of having a royal commission on this. We do not think that is necessary. However, we would prefer to see the issue discussed openly before the standing committee with a good number of guest speakers and all willing witnesses coming forward to give their perspectives on the issues.

This royal commission, despite all of the other Pearson flaws, would be like using a hammer to kill a fly and would undoubtedly become a prime example of yet more millions spent uselessly. Therefore, it is becoming more and more obvious that the old line parties are no longer focusing. They need to focus on the public interest rather than on the political interest or the line of friendship that I talked about earlier.

Even when they try to address political corruption they are no longer able to act without making sure that their friends are being taken care of, or at least that impression may be given. Section 9 is claiming no compensation is owed but it is already mitigated and contradicted by section 10 which says that the minister, if he feels so inclined, may give any compensation he feels fit to give.

This whole issue highlights the crying need for change in Canada's political system. It is time for a new political association to wipe the old ones off the map for a while, to erase the old blackboard covered thick with old IOUs. It is time to start with a clean political slate. I would suggest it is time to start with the Reform Party of Canada.

• (1025)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to acknowledge all those taking part in this debate. I understand that we do not all share the same views. I would also like to remind those listening to us that it was two weeks ago that the Official Opposition undertook to shed some light on the now unfortunate tale of Pearson Airport.

The more we debate this issue, the more this sad tale reminds us of how the traditional political parties equate politics with favouritism and lobbying. Indeed, lobbying, favouritism and politics are often viewed as one and the same thing. That is why the Official Opposition, being the responsible group that it is, wanted to shed some light on this transaction. Surely you have never doubted that we are a responsible party because we have never acted other than responsibly since being elected to sit as the Official Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, could you ask the hon. members to applaud my comments?

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Ménard: We must not, however, lose sight of the fact that this is a serious issue. Since my hon. colleague is speaking about facts, it would be a good idea to remind him that as we speak, the Liberal government has yet to make the details of this deal public. Yet, we are discussing a transaction that has major financial implications. Our listeners should know that we are conducting this debate without the actual contract in hand, without knowing in detail the contractual obligations which bound the former government to the consortium in question.

Perhaps it would be a good idea to review some of the events leading up to this transaction. They clearly show that in our political system, until such time as we have lobbying legislation with teeth, it will always be possible for a government to indulge in favouritism.

The following question arises then. How is it that this government, when in opposition, stressed many times the need to review the lobbying legislation and even made this issue a priority? And how is it that six months after coming to power, it still has made no attempt to conduct such a review? We are critical of the government for its failure to act on this matter.

While we may agree with its decision to cancel the Conservative deal, we can only wonder why it did not see things through to their logical conclusion. Since the two parties are in agreement, something that does not happen often during the life of a Parliament, why will the government not attack the root of the problem by urgently introducing legislation here in the House to deal with the explosive issue of lobbying? Both the Reform Party and the Official Opposition would be ready to move on this matter immediately and would make themselves available.