

Oral Questions

compliance with the conflict of interest guidelines and received the assurance that there was full compliance. I went further and instructed the Deputy Prime Minister to meet specifically with the then Minister and received further assurances. I met with him myself and received the assurances that I conveyed to Members of the House of Commons.

My hon. friend says in his prefatory remarks that he wanted a certain question included in the terms of reference. I beg to differ with my hon. friend. My recollection is that opposition Parties did not want an impartial Royal Commission at all; they wanted some kind of a parliamentary group. We are the ones who established an impartial Royal Commission to get all the truth out because we had absolutely nothing to hide and we wanted Canadians to have all the truth via an impartial Royal Commission.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR ETHICAL STANDARDS OF GOVERNMENT

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—Port au Port—St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. Canadians want honesty and morality to be the practice of the Government of Canada. Morality can begin to be restored if Mr. Justice Parker's recommendations on conflict of interest are followed. I believe that honesty can begin to be restored if the Prime Minister accepts today his personal responsibility for the failure of the conflict of interest guidelines authored by the Prime Minister.

In that regard I would ask the Prime Minister if he stands by his words of September 9, 1985, in a letter to all Members of Parliament, in which he said that the ultimate responsibility for the ethical standards of the federal Government rested with the Cabinet and more particularly with him.

If the Prime Minister stands by those words, is he prepared to acknowledge today in light of the findings of the Parker Commission Report that in fact the Prime Minister did not take all the action necessary to enforce his conflict of interest guidelines?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the question is do I accept responsibility for what happens to members of my Government and the answer is yes. That is the responsibility of the Leader, the Prime Minister, and I say that without any hesitation.

If my hon. friend wants to be fair in a sensitive matter that applies to all Members of the House, I would refer him to what the Chief Justice said. He said:

It is important to remember that no conflict of interest system can, by itself, guarantee ethics in government or prevent dishonourable conduct on the part of cabinet ministers or other public office holders. Ultimately, public trust and confidence in the integrity of government depends upon the integrity of individual public office holders and their individual sense of honour.

Having said that, I will say that I think we had what many people would consider to be a good set of conflict of interest guidelines. The judge thinks that they are less than adequate and he has made some recommendations for full disclosure

and other matters that I have accepted, and we will be acting upon them quickly.

I think, in the circumstances, the appropriateness of appointing an independent royal commission to examine fully the conduct of the Minister represented a substantial departure from past practice in regard to allegations made in this House. I think it was helpful to the political process in Canada and provided the beneficial rule changes that have been suggested which the Government will be dealing with very quickly.

PRIME MINISTER'S ACCEPTANCE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—Port au Port—St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Prime Minister for his answer but I believe, with respect, that he missed the point. There have been many occasions when the Prime Minister rose in the House with respect to allegations that had been made, either outside the House or inside the House, and gave the House his personal assurance upon his personal investigation that there had been no problem, no conflict of interest or no wrongdoing.

The Prime Minister is telling us today that in the case of the Member for York—Peel he was wrong in retrospect. That calls into question the process that was followed on the many other occasions the Prime Minister had given similar assurances in the House.

My question is simple. The process of restoring the public's confidence in the morality and honesty of Parliament and the Government of Canada can only begin if the Prime Minister rises in his place today and accepts his personal responsibility for failing to impose a set of conflict of interest guidelines authored by the Prime Minister himself because adequate measures were not taken to investigate and ensure those guidelines were being followed. Will the Prime Minister admit that today?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, as I have already indicated, I accept at all times the responsibility for what happens to my Government and my Party and their members. That is a fact of political leadership. One ought never to shirk that responsibility and I am not seeking to, under any circumstances.

My hon. friend is asking whether the conflict of interest guidelines were appropriate. I believed they were when I brought them in. I think many Members on both sides of the House thought they were demanding and exacting when compared with those of other jurisdictions, but clearly that is not a view that is shared by Chief Justice Parker who, having examined this matter, recommends full disclosure and the enactment of legislation in regard to conflict of interest.

Conflict of interest is an extremely complex and difficult human problem. As the judge has pointed out, and I am not trying to hide behind anything the judge has said, the best system in the world will never function unless all Members of Parliament want to live by the spirit and the letter of that law.