

Conflict of Interest

Louis St. Laurent, who had the same character and integrity. Such example, of course, sets the tone of the cabinet itself.

When the vote comes tonight I hope we will have the support of hon. members for the amendment. We should differentiate between cabinet minister and backbenchers. Backbenchers do have some knowledge when bills come before them or when facts are given to the House, but cabinet ministers are decision makers and are privy to knowledge long before parliament.

I sit here day after day, and what I object to, when questions are asked, are cabinet ministers who leave the impression with the media that there is no difference between privy councillors and ordinary members of parliament. I am not fond of the term "backbencher". A lot of people who use the term "front bencher" and "backbencher" seem to think it denotes where a member sits. As I understand British political history, a frontbencher is a privy councillor. Whether he sits in the back row or in the front row, he is equally a member of parliament. However, there is a difference between a member of the cabinet and a member of parliament when it comes to questions of conflict of interest.

I hope that whatever rules are laid down there will be no straitjacket. I agree with my hon. friend that a blind trust, or that putting stock in what is called a frozen trust, is no real, solid solution. We need sound rules. In order to play baseball or football we must lay down the rules of the game, so the game can be played properly and responsibly. Any member of this House can suggest a rule or put something down in writing, but one thing I have learned as a lawyer is that if a person in his own conscience sets out to do wrong and intends to do wrong, no matter what is written in a document or in all of the statute books, that person will do wrong.

I hope that whatever rules are laid down, whether for cabinet ministers or for members of parliament, there will not be a straitjacket in any sense of that word. I come back to my opening remark, that the strength of the question whether we allow our public interests to conflict with our personal interests depends upon the integrity, calibre and character of the men and women who are elected to this place. Since I have only ten minutes and I see my time has already elapsed, I should like to hear from some of my colleagues in this connection.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Joyal (Maisonneuve-Rosemont): Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to take part in the debate. This debate is all the more important as it comes a few days after the discussion of the topic which has aroused Canadian public opinion, and stirred this side of the House as well as the other. That debate also proved the vulnerability of political parties. Indeed, we learned in the course of the deliberations that as many hon. members on this side of the House as hon. members of the official opposition, received contributions from unions whose activities have brought up questions in several person's minds. I was surprised, Mr. Speaker, to learn that hon. members of the opposition had also accepted gifts, all in all quite modest, from a union, thus exposing themselves, to comparable blame, which the ministers willingly pointed out. Indeed, if the majority—

[Mr. Woolliams.]

Mr. Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I apologize to the hon. member. I think he made a *lapsus linguae* when he said hon. members of the official opposition and of the other parties. I want to point out to him that it has been publicly confirmed that the Social Credit Party was not involved with the unions concerned.

Mr. Joyal: I thank the hon. member for Lotbinière; the point he raised is indeed correct.

I was pointing out, Mr. Speaker, that if a majority of Canadian voters had favoured members of the party of the official opposition we would probably have had the same debate, and vice versa, as in the final analysis our system showed in the past that the door was open to actions by groups that could readily be questioned.

• (2140)

And that is precisely why the 29th Parliament passed a bill thenceforth allowing all members of recognized parties to receive contributions, but also disclose the origin of such contributions.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I think that today's debate is the logical follow-up to those situations we pointed out, that the prime responsibility for detecting conflicts of interest rests with the political party itself.

Indeed, when political parties have to choose candidates, quite often they must take into account a number of factors, including of course the honesty of individuals, their competence, and also their role in the professional world.

As a matter of fact, most parties that want to undergo a change are increasingly looking for candidates with extensive experience, and that experience includes the realm of business, of professions, of education as well as all sectors related to government activities.

It would be quite easy, Mr. Speaker, when considering the situation of every member, to find that at a given moment one or the other could be in conflict of interest. It is not because of person is not a shareholder of a company or a property owner that he or she is necessarily unaffected by all kinds of conflicts of interest.

When a bill is introduced in the House, an active union member or a businessman fights for the opinions, the interests of the people among whom he has gained his own experience.

And in this context, I think it is a little simplistic to limit the debate or conflict of interest solely to the financial aspect. This responsibility of political parties should be thoroughly investigated to develop a code of ethics. And I believe it is really on this area that we should concentrate.

A code of ethics, Mr. Speaker, does not have a solely repressive effect, it does not aim simply at imposing sanctions for offenses, but it also has a normative effect. The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe (Mr. Wagner), when underlining the importance of an investigation on organized crime in a previous speech, showed that the aim of such an investigation was not necessarily repressive but normative, that it aimed at warning people about a possible danger and at contributing to the development of a valid policy taking these dangers into account. I believe