

Conflict of Interest

more obliged to be honest, to use a general term, than an individual in private life is required to be honest with his employer. This is because politics also affects the stability of institutions and the very essence of democracy. Every time a politician does something wrong, not only are ethical standards violated, but the strength and credibility of the State are also affected. This is very serious and it imposes an additional obligation.

One must also realize that things have evolved, of course. Like it or not, we all sometimes say, "when I was young," or "In my father's or grandfather's day, people were more honest." I do not believe that is true. I believe that we are really witnessing a positive development in institutions and public attitudes. For instance, it is very obvious that morals have evolved and have become more refined as democratic standards have grown more sophisticated, to the extent that what was acceptable 50 years ago no longer is so these days. The extremely clear and evident outcome is that politicians—men and women alike—simply have to be better, if you will, more rigorous than their predecessors.

From day to day, from one year to the next, and from one Government to another, an extremely difficult adaptation has to be made in keeping with the rising expectations of the people, and these expectations can readily be perceived with respect to controls, for example. One of the essential controls these days—not the only one, yet patently basic—is the one exercised by the media.

The media are ever more vigilant. I, for one, do not believe they ought to be taken to task, for they are the realistic image of a parallel phenomenon between public expectations, higher democratic standards, and additional media responsibilities. As guardians of public life and of a minimum of integrity and decency in public endeavours, the media as well must shoulder heavier responsibilities in response to the expectations of the people.

Of course this highlights the fact that public life is becoming ever more trying, that sometimes one wonders why anybody would want to go into politics, that sometimes when a decision has to be made one would even ask the question: should I jump into this lion's den? Should I agree to give up most of my own private activities to meet the new requirements of political life? And so we now find ourselves in a position such that we have to make an assessment in the context of the rules governing public life.

● (1010)

Madam Speaker, you are looking at a Bill introduced by a Government which did experience some difficulties and did make the odd mistake with respect to problems of this kind. If we forget all about the acrimonious political and biased debates, if we forget all about the passions which prevail in our obviously partisan proceedings in a venue such as this one, and when we take a closer look at ourselves, we come to realize that such problems have always been part and parcel of political activities and that, generally speaking, they have been much more complex than others we may have experienced during the first years of this Government.

I suggest it would be frivolous and vain to put on trial all Governments which preceded us in Ottawa. We could list names and identify people. We are all aware of the facts of public life. We have all been affected by the news which were published in the newspapers. We could mention a series of episodes throughout the Canadian history, but we will not, Madam Speaker, for fear of losing sight of the main purpose of this legislative initiative.

Madam Speaker, the main purpose is to look to the future, to meet the expectations of Canadian citizens, in order to prevent a repetition of what happened under a Government in 1910, under another Government in 1920 and again in the years after that. And the perfect place to start is right here.

It is not the newspapermen and reporters who can devise an enforceable system. It is not our fellow citizens watching television in their own homes who can change things. This is our responsibility. If we cannot achieve this here, nobody will. The buck stops here! If we should allow the system to continue as it has until now, Madam Speaker, we are well aware that all the Governments which will follow us, because they are made up of fallible human beings, will be exposed to temptations. All Governments are made up of human beings.

An Hon. Member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Bouchard (Lac-Saint-Jean): Listen! I know that the person who has the floor should remain indifferent to all these shouts, but since I am not as thick-skinned as my hon. colleagues, I should like to be able to say quietly what I have to say, without being interrupted by all these untimely remarks, Madam Speaker. This is undoubtedly the rule of the game here and one should be able to accept that. However, I am extremely disappointed to realize that it is impossible in this House to say anything significant, to deal with basic issues, and to meet the expectations of Canadian voters. I was chosen by 50,000 people and sent here to say what I have to say, and I should like to be able to do so without being exposed to constant harassment.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Bouchard (Lac-Saint-Jean): I know, Madam Speaker, that this will not stop people from screaming, but I will go on.

I was saying, Madam Speaker, that every one of us, wherever we sit in this Chamber, will be held accountable by history for this exercise we are engaged in. Little by little, we are in the process together, whether we agree or not, of making things progress, of advancing the exercise of democracy in Canada.

Considering what we have done in the past two years, although I was not here, I believe I have reason enough to be proud of being a Member of this Government which, for the first time, has enacted regulations under which the process for the appointment of judges will be more impartial and objective than ever before. I am not saying, far from it, that bad appointments have been made, that judges who are now dispensing justice in Canada are not good judges.