

Conflict of Interest

As I said, we have some concerns about the way the Bill applies to spouses. I still feel that the Bill should require public disclosure of Members' assets, instead of secret statements. I believe that the parliamentary committee should have some powers, and we know that the committee's powers are not too clear in the Bill. For compliance measures to work, public statements should be required, and the legislation is rather confusing on this point.

[English]

Some people will claim that, if conflict of interest rules are strict, or if government ethic rules are strict, this would discourage people from seeking public office. To all those people who are of the belief that stricter rules discourage people from seeking public office, I wish to quote from the Hon. W. D. Parker's *Commission of Inquiry into the Facts of Allegations of Conflict of Interest Concerning the Honourable Sinclair M. Stevens* which states at page 350:

By all accounts the U.S. disclosure requirements are working reasonably well. There have been criticisms relating to investigation and enforcement, but the requirements in principle have received wide-ranging approval.

I was particularly interested to learn that the disclosure requirements have not discouraged "good people" from entering politics or running for public office. For example, a study of members of the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate conducted by the Center for Responsive Politics in 1985 found no one who felt that financial disclosure affected his or her decision to seek public office.

In other words, there is no evidence to support the contention that some people might have that conflict of interest rules, in particular public disclosure of assets, would discourage people from seeking public office.

I would like to argue the contrary, that, in fact, good and appropriate rules would probably encourage people to seek public office, knowing that their reputation will be enhanced once they are in office rather than observing the sad spectacle which we sometimes see today. One of the things that this Bill does not do, as I said previously, is that it does not provide for public disclosure. Justice Parker, in his report, insisted that this be a component of any new legislation or code regarding conflict of interest. He also said that public disclosure has to apply not only to the spouse and to the Parliamentarian, but that there should also be a disclosure of assets for spouses of Parliamentarians.

● (1650)

I read here from page 357 of the Parker Commission report, where His Honour, Justice Parker, said:

In light of these views, and despite any apparent unease men may have about being publicly scrutinized because of their wives' public profile, I am satisfied that a modern conflict of interest regime requires public disclosure of the financial interests of spouses, whether male or female. I am fortified in this conclusion by the fact that all Canadian provinces with rules for disclosure by office holders apply a disclosure requirement to spouses as well.

In other words, what Justice Parker is telling us is that, at the provincial level, where rules exist concerning the disclosure

of assets by public office holders, the spouse of the public office holder is always covered.

What the Government is proposing in this Bill is a mild form, if you wish, of the same thing. It is interesting to note that it is that proposal in the legislation which has caused the most uproar, particularly from spouses of Members opposite.

The Minister seemed to suggest a while ago that in fact this Government had invented rules on public sector ethics, as if it was a normal process of evolution of Governments whereby this Government established all kinds of new rules and that it is the fault of not having rules there which made the situation what it is today. First of all, that is totally incorrect. This Government did not invent the rules. I must say that in my opinion this Government needs more rules than any other. Be that as it may, the first conflict of interest guidelines that were introduced—and I have a copy of them at hand—were introduced in Parliament on November 8, 1974—

An Hon. Member: There was no law for 18 years.

Mr. Boudria: —by then Prime Minister Trudeau. On August 7, 1979, the Right Hon. Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark), when he was the Prime Minister, introduced a new set of guidelines. They were not a law either, but we forgive him for that. He introduced guidelines in 1979, when he was the Prime Minister of Canada. I now hear Conservatives across the way saying, "Those were not laws". That is true. It is quite correct to say that the Right Hon. Secretary of State, when he was Prime Minister, failed to introduce a law, just like everyone else. So if the Parliamentary Secretary, who is making these funny noises across the way, is suggesting that, I agree with her.

On April 28, 1980, the Liberal Government, when it came back into power, introduced new and tougher guidelines. These guidelines were getting more and more complex, as they should have been in order to ensure that Governments were behaving in the way that they should. The same Government commissioned a working group in order to produce a report.

[Translation]

I have in my hand here a copy of the report from the conflict of interest task force chaired by the Hon. Michael Starr and the Hon. Mitchell Sharp—they were co-chairmen—and the executive director of the project was a man by the name of J. Patrick Boyer, who is now a Member of this House. This report was tabled in Parliament and it recommended reforms of ethics in the public sector. Well, all this to say, Madam Speaker, that this matter has been under consideration for a long time. Several successive Governments have presented different initiatives. So the Minister who just presented his Bill to us was a little mistaken, to say the least, when he suggested that his Government had invented the wheel. This Government has not invented much, as we know, Madam Speaker.