

sion know this—are not free to sell such holdings except with the permission of the licensing authority, in this case the Canadian Radio-Television Commission. In ordinary circumstances this is a sensible regulation and I believe, if my memory serves me right, that my hon. friend from Annapolis Valley and I both voted for it in committee some years ago. So I have no quarrel here and, if the hon. member's memory is as good as I think it is, he will concede that we both agreed on that point. So the proposition that the CRTC should have the right to approve a sale is sensible. In ordinary circumstances there is no problem with it. However, for members of parliament and ministers that proposition has created real, indeed almost insuperable difficulties, as I have discovered.

In the first place a sale requires negotiations with one or more of the potential buyers. That is demonstrably true, it seems to me. I would not consider it proper for a shareholder, particularly for a minister, in those circumstances to carry on such negotiations personally. To do so would certainly offend against the spirit of what we have always believed to be a proper guide of conduct for members and ministers in this House. I should like the committee to consider this inhibition, this difficulty placed in front of each of us, whether as private members or as ministers.

● (2010)

Second, even if such negotiations were carried out successfully by the party concerned, the CRTC is under no requirement to approve a sale or to accept a particular buyer as being satisfactory. This is the law of the land. I mention it in the context of the CRTC, but my belief is that it applies to other regulatory agencies where similar circumstances prevail.

In my case, faced with this dilemma, I wrote to a trusted friend a year and a half ago asking him to accept full authority from me to negotiate the sale of my holdings, making it abundantly clear that, if he accepted, there would be no consultation with me and that I would be fully prepared to agree to whatever arrangements he could work out himself.

The gentleman in question—and I hasten to add that he is in no way related to me, nor do I have any business connections with him—was prepared to accept the assignment, for which I am extremely grateful because it is not easy to find someone ready to accept that kind of responsibility. Since that time the only information with which he has provided me is that in December, 1973, an offer to purchase my holdings was filed as required with the Canadian Television and Radio Commission. As hon. members know, it is for the commission, and for the commission alone to determine the scheduling of its deliberations and to date it has not heard the application. I suggest to hon. members that my judgment was correct in saying I would not consider it proper for me to request the commission to accommodate me, and therefore I have made no contact with them whatever.

Hon. members might well consider, during their deliberations, whether it would be appropriate to suggest to the CRTC and to other licensing authorities that special arrangements might apply in cases such as I have outlined. I believe, if I may say this in parenthesis, that a member of this House, be he a minister or otherwise,

Conflict of Interest

should probably have the right to request a licensing agency, whatever it might be, to give some kind of priority attention to matters of this nature.

From my point of view I have been in the hands of the CRTC for over a year with no opportunity whatever, other than one which might well be considered an improper intervention, to ask the CRTC to deal with this matter expeditiously. These are the facts of the matter. They are on record, and they are clear for everyone to see. I am most anxious to have this matter dealt with expeditiously. In the meantime, I have, of course, complied with the conflict of interest guidelines.

As a matter of fact since my holdings have been a matter of public record each year in the CRTC report, there has been full disclosure; whatever argument there may be among hon. members about full disclosure it certainly cannot apply in this case. There has been full disclosure, and the option I exercised was a perfectly natural one for me to exercise under the guidelines. I am pleased to have the opportunity to repeat what I have said many times publicly—that I have never in my years of public life sought in any way to benefit from my position. Quite the contrary, as the chairman of the CRTC can attest if any member cares to get in touch with him, my only representation to him, since entering parliament, has been in the course of efforts to get CBC service into remote parts of Newfoundland and other distant areas, and I am confident that all members will agree that this is part of my responsibility as a member of the House and that, indeed, far from reflecting some kind of personal interest it was, if anything the reverse—we are talking about small repeaters which are not significant from a profit point of view. I was trying to get the CBC to move more rapidly than it has in reaching people in remote parts of the country, and I am sure no one will accuse me of conflict of interest in that kind of situation.

I should say, too, that the chairman of the CRTC, who is known generally and widely respected by every member of the House as an independent and conscientious public servant, has already stated publicly on several occasions that I have never attempted even to discuss with him any matter being dealt with by the commission.

I respect the hon. member for Annapolis Valley for making the distinction this afternoon between matters which relate to my responsibilities as a minister and matters affecting my responsibilities as a member of parliament—those touching my constituents. I say to him that no person I am aware of can state I ever discussed any other matter with the CRTC relating to my own province except those which had to do with service to remote areas, and if there is any doubt left in his mind I suggest the chairman of the CRTC be asked to confirm what I have said. Despite this, let me say in all sincerity that I shall be glad when the necessary CRTC hearing has been held and the matter disposed of, Mr. Speaker.

At the same time—and I am asking hon. members to consider soberly what I am saying—it is a case where the cost of public service can come high. Many hon. members, some of them sitting on the opposite benches as well as on this side of the House, know what it is like to build a business from scratch—there are others who know this is precisely what happened in the case in question. It can be