

Oral Questions

Minister ask for the Minister's resignation or did the Minister offer his resignation?

● (1415)

[English]

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition tries to leave the wrong impression when he speaks of the former Minister's responses. He is aware that a week ago last Thursday the former Minister commenced answering questions. He answered all throughout last week, including two hours in a subcommittee. It was on that basis, reflecting on it over the weekend in all likelihood, that led the former Minister to write to the Prime Minister in terms which are now in the public domain.

PRIME MINISTER'S RESPONSIBILITY

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the ex-Minister answered only when he was given the go signal by the Deputy Prime Minister from time to time. My question now relates to the Deputy Prime Minister's responsibility, and even more important, the Prime Minister's responsibility. Would he, and the Prime Minister on his return, be prepared to answer when, for how long, and what they knew about the conflict of interest of the former Minister, and would they be prepared to make that kind of statement to the House?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Acting Prime Minister): What the right hon. gentleman accuses me of, namely, the former Minister responding only when I gave the go signal, is totally false. If he goes over the record carefully, he knows better than to say that. Here we have the spectacle of the right hon. gentleman and his colleagues in the Opposition saying for over a week that there should be an impartial investigation as to the facts. His remarks and two questions today are a shining example of why such an investigation is not going to be impartial in this atmosphere.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST INQUIRY

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I heard an interjection from the government benches and it was reflected in the ex-Minister's statement this morning. Does the Government not admit there was a conflict of interest? If not, why the resignation?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Acting Prime Minister): The answer is obvious, Sir. After the Minister's responses for two weeks, here and in committee, there was still an apparent confusion as to facts—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nielsen:—to put the best light on it. They ridicule even now the response of the Minister himself—

Some Hon. Members: You!

Mr. Nielsen:—when he asked, in his letter to the Prime Minister, for an impartial person to be appointed to investigate the facts.

Mr. Deans: I'll do it.

Mr. Nielsen: Surely that is the proper course to pursue. That impartiality is obviously not here by virtue of the intemperate charges of corruption by the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition and the conduct of his own members in committee.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

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[Translation]

CROWN CORPORATIONS

PROPOSED SALE OF CANADAIR—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Bob Kaplan (York Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the same Minister. I would like to know whether the Deputy Prime Minister could inform the House whether, now that an inquiry has been proposed, the Government is willing to stop the sale or consideration of the sale of Canadair, in order to find out whether the Minister's conflict of interest has in any way affected the public interest and the sale of Canadair in the best interests of Canadians.

● (1420)

[English]

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Acting Prime Minister): No, Mr. Speaker. As the former Minister and I have explained for well over a week now, that matter is in the hands, not of the Government at the moment, but of a divestiture committee of the corporation itself—

Mr. Orlikow: Appointed by that Minister.

Mr. Nielsen:—which in turn will be reporting and which in turn is being guided by a task force on privatization chaired by the President of the Treasury Board.

SALE OF DE HAVILLAND

Hon. Bob Kaplan (York Centre): Mr. Speaker, will the inquiry which is to be set up to look into this conflict of interest be able to look also at the sale of de Havilland to see why that company was sold for such a ridiculously low price and whether there is any ulterior explanation for that?

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the former Minister, Members in both opposition Parties, and