

*Supply*

elected officials, the way in which they conduct official business and the way mistakes are dealt with if they are covered up by the Opposition or, indeed, by the press.

The fact is that if there are weaknesses in that system of guidelines, then it is incumbent on us, as Members of the House of Commons, to consider in a committee of the House ways in which these guidelines can be made more effective. Let me just make a couple of points as to why we should have these guidelines and where they are defective.

They are defective, as I see it, on the basis of debate which has taken place, particularly as they relate to former office holders. One reason is that we have seen instances of communications, of dealings between former office holders, former Cabinet Ministers, and their former Departments. I mention a couple only by way of examples, not that I am trying to make this a personal reference. However, the fact is that these are cases in point.

Mr. Donald Macdonald was Minister of Finance before his resignation. The guidelines stated that there should be no dealings with one's former Department for a two year period. Within a period of two years of his resignation, Mr. Donald Macdonald was placed on the Board of Directors of the McDonnell Douglas Corporation, which was involved in negotiating the fighter aircraft contract with the federal Government. A major player in the negotiations with respect to the awarding of that contract was the Department of Finance. What was wrong with Members of the Opposition at that time raising questions as to whether there was a breach of the conflict of interest guidelines respecting a former office holder?

• (1650)

In the case of Alastair Gillespie, which we have recently gone through, a similar situation obtained. There is no question as to the facts. Mr. Gillespie was in touch with his former Department, clearly dealing with Government assistants in putting his promotion through, which led him to a profit situation. He profited from the transaction. He profited from moneys being paid to the consortium. I do not draw any conclusion. I am only saying that these are former office holders who have clearly, on the face of it, breached the conflict of interest guidelines.

We asked the Prime Minister what he could do about the situation. The Prime Minister said he could do nothing. The question is very simple: what should we be doing? Should we review the situation as to how to handle breaches of the conflict of interest guidelines by former office holders? The answer to any reasonable observer of the scene should be, yes, there should be an opportunity to look at them.

The second consideration may well be this: is it good enough under the present circumstances for the matter to be left completely at the discretion of the Prime Minister whenever there is an allegation or charge made of conflict of interest breaches? The Prime Minister and the Minister of State for International Trade (Mr. Regan), who started off for the Government side on this motion, argue that that is the way our system works, it is the way it should be, and it should be left

with the Prime Minister to decide whether there have been any breaches and what action should be taken with respect to current office holders.

These same arguments were used with respect to the whole concept of freedom of information, the concept that the Government will be judged on its actions as to whether it releases information to the public, that if people are unhappy with the way the Government deals with the matter, they will vote against it. In every election there is an opportunity for Canadians to exercise their franchise with respect to how the Government operated while in power. It was only after very diligent pursuit by the Opposition that the Government finally agreed to the concept of an independent judicial or quasi-judicial officer who would be able to pass judgment as to whether or not Government documents would be released to the citizens of this country.

This is an analogous situation. It is something that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections could consider. Do we now require an independent officer who can receive complaints with respect to conflict of interest situations and have the full power and ability, quite independently of the Government, to investigate those charges?

What is wrong with that kind of situation, analogous as it is to the freedom of information legislation? There is nothing wrong with it. I find a growing feeling among the public that the time has now come to have a very close review of the guidelines and the sanctions available or not available, as well as the question of whether legislation should or should not be introduced.

What can be wrong, after an experience of some ten years following the time when the matter was first raised, for a standing committee to be given the authority to review what is happening? I direct my remarks to the Hon. Member for Vaudeuil (Mr. Herbert) because he raised these questions in an earlier part of this debate. I will give him some examples of questions that could be considered by the Standing Committee on Elections and Privileges.

First, should there be an independent quasi-judicial official established by legislation to deal with these matters? Second, what are the sanctions that can be applied in terms of former office holders if they do breach the guidelines? Third, should we consider legislation to deal with sanctions that should take place if there is a breach of the guidelines by current office holders? That will be a fairly full plate for any standing committee. It is germane and legitimate.

As I indicated, this debate follows an episode which, in my opinion, can only be described as a flagrant breach of the Prime Minister's own guidelines. I referred earlier to Donald Macdonald, Alastair Gillespie and Judd Buchanan who was involved in dealings with the Banff National Park. It involved negotiations with Treasury Board of which he was President, and it was within a two-year period. I am not charging any illegality, but the guidelines say that there should be no perception of preferred access or treatment with Government Departments by a former office holder.