

Supply

Scotia, received anything that was not available to any member of the public who applied for a common public program.

Mr. Deans: That is not true.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Again, the difficulty of the Chair is to try to apportion time. The Hon. Member for Saskatoon West (Mr. Hnatyshyn) is seeking the floor.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Mr. Speaker, I should like to address a short question to the Minister. In the course of his remarks he suggested that it is completely inappropriate for a committee of the House to consider the question of rules or guidelines relating to conflict of interest for Ministers or public servants. As has been pointed out by previous speakers, the words of this motion are the words of a motion that was previously accepted unanimously by the House. Indeed, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), speaking with respect to conflict of interest guidelines for Ministers, said: "That is why the Government has placed its proposals related to Members of Parliament and Senators before the House for its consideration. We would hope that after a study of the problem in Committee and after having received comments from Hon. Members, an Independence of Parliament Act will be introduced and passed in this House. The announcement of the Government's policy is, then, a first step only."

● (1230)

If it was all right in 1974 for Members of Parliament to consider this matter, now that we know the Prime Minister says there is no sanction against former office holders and that that is a weakness in the conflict of interest guidelines, why is it wrong for Members of Parliament to consider conflict of interest guidelines for Ministers and former office holders now? What does the Government have to hide? Why does it fight this with all its vigour as the majority in the House of Commons?

Mr. Regan: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member is quoting situations here in 1974 under different circumstances. That was following a Green Paper which was referred for consideration. That is a very different matter.

This is the second day we have spent on the matter, plus endless questions and mini-debates in the House all arising out of smear efforts in relation to Mr. Gillespie's legitimate business dealings with the Government. I reiterate that of course Hon. Members of the House should be able to give their opinions. They will do so in this debate in relation to what they think the guidelines should be, what should be included and how they should be enforced. Of course they will do that; of course they are doing it in the debate.

I do not happen to think that guidelines should be established by a Committee of the House or by the House. I think they must be established by whoever is Prime Minister of the day from time to time, that they must be to his satisfaction, and that he must answer to the House and the electorate for them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The period of questions and answers has expired. The Chair recognizes the Hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald) on debate.

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, I may say with a degree of sadness that nothing could more clearly indicate the Government's complete lack of comprehension of what this issue is all about than the remarks and comments made by the Minister of State for International Trade (Mr. Regan). He does not seem to grasp what the debate before us today is about. He said that he had difficulty understanding our position. He talked merely of it being a question of ins and outs. He said we should be discussing other issues. I say to that Minister and to every other Minister sitting on the Liberal benches that there is no greater issue before the country than that Canadians have trust and confidence in their parliamentary institutions. This is what the debate is about today.

On February 24, 1983, the combined Opposition, the Progressive Conservative Party and the New Democratic Party, failed in its motion to censure the Government concerning the same events which have precipitated the debate today. We failed not because of the efforts of the Opposition, but because the Government had too much in the way of a majority and too little in the way of parliamentary integrity.

It may be that today's motion will also fail. If the Government was not persuaded as to its moral responsibility on February 24 by the clear and incontrovertible proof that was offered concerning the abuses of the conflict of interest guidelines, then I do not imagine it will be compelled by arguments today. After all, the Government has no less of a majority today than it did then and I would argue that it has no more integrity than it did then.

But let us be under no illusion. The failure today, if such it be, will not be the failure of an Opposition motion. It will be the failure of the Government of Canada to live up to the basic tenets of parliamentary democracy. Indeed, it will be seen as a failure of the whole Parliament of Canada to conduct itself by the same standards and code of morality which it seeks daily to impose upon its citizens through the process of formulating, revising and passing the laws of the country.

As has been pointed out repeatedly by Ministers over the past number of weeks, the guidelines which lie at the heart of this debate are to them just that—merely guidelines; they are not law, they are not binding. Indeed, by the cynical actions of the Ministers and their votes, they give proof positive to the view that the guidelines have no moral authority.

The present guidelines have been in effect for several years now. It was thought that Cabinet Ministers understood them, that they grasped the impact of their message. Now these same Ministers suddenly stand before us and say that they find the language in which the guidelines are couched to be confusing. In recent days the House has been treated to a redefinition and an ongoing change of meaning of many words, words which we thought were understood, words like "lobby",