

*Supply*

ested to speak on the motion of my colleague from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, which reads as follows:

That this House condemns the government for its continued failure to establish and to adhere to a clear and high standard of public sector ethics, for its incessant inability to function within the framework of existing legislation, guidelines and standards and for its reluctance to bring forward strict new codes and legislation with regard to conflicts and other public ethics matters.

I will come back later to the wording used by my colleague to show that, in some respects, he may have gone a little too far in his assertions.

I believe it is important to take part in this debate which gives an opportunity to government members and to all members of this House to correct the impression that politicians are usually corrupt. I believe that, unless proven otherwise, no member of this House was elected with the intention of defrauding the government or pursuing his own personal interest or those of his friends.

I will not speak for other members, but personally, when I ran for office in 1984, it was primarily because I was convinced that I could do important things to improve the quality of life of Canadians and of my constituents. I was convinced then, and I still am, that I was going to Ottawa, to my riding and to all Canadian provinces, to serve and promote the collective interests of the people, and not my personal interests, not the interests of my party or those of my party's friends, but first and foremost the interests of every Canadian.

I came here to work with a great national party and I came with the deep conviction that we could implement policies for the short, medium and long term which would enable the public to benefit more from the initiatives taken by the government.

Of course we could argue about the value of those policies because ours is a multi-party system. We could discuss certain issues, but that is not the purpose of this evening's debate. Rather, I want to say that I do not consider myself a corrupt politician and I do not think that my colleagues are corrupt either. When I work for my constituents I do not think that I am working for my personal interests or for interests which will benefit me personally, and I believe the same is true for my colleagues.

Again, Madam Speaker, when you look at the work done by every committee and every member of this

House, I believe that unless proven otherwise, they are all basically honest and work to the best of their knowledge, first and foremost to serve the interests of the people who elected them, as well as the interests of the people of Canada or their province, depending on whether they work at the federal or provincial level. I want to stress that particular point today because people are inclined to believe—at least that is what we have heard since the beginning of this debate—there is no legislation regulating the conduct of members or public servants or people who work in government. I think they are greatly mistaken. In the course of this debate, there has been no reference to the fact that the Criminal Code of Canada applies to members of Parliament.

• (1920)

Madam Speaker, if you will allow me, section 122 of the Criminal Code provides: "Every official"—and according to a Supreme Court judgment official also includes members of Parliament—who in connection with the duties of his office commits fraud or breach of trust is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years, whether or not the fraud or breach of trust would be an offence if it were committed in relation to a private person.

In one of the papers submitted to the joint committee on Bill C-43, a bill dealing with conflict of interest, our researcher wrote, with respect to breach of trust and fraud under Section 122: "Whether or not the fraud or breach of trust would be an offence if it were committed in relation to a private person. The Criminal Code explicitly applies stricter standards of conduct to a holder of public office than it does to a private person".

This makes it quite clear that members of Parliament in general and those elected to this House in particular do not assume, as some opposition members have done, that they are above the law or that their position gives them the power to avoid the provisions of any laws that may apply, such as the Criminal Code. They do not, because it says in section 122 and in the working papers we received that politicians, that members of Parliament are subject to stricter rules than a private person where fraud, abuse of power and breach of trust are concerned. I do not think that point was made today.