

Ministerial Conduct

Pictou has stated, the first question asked, the one as a result of which the ministers suddenly developed memories of what had taken place, was a written question by the hon. member for Cape Breton South which was answered on December 16. That question was as follows:

Arising out of the investigation into bankruptcy frauds now in progress in Montreal, has the government secured any information showing that the records and documents connected with bankruptcy proceedings by Max and Adolph Sefkind and/or their companies disclose contributions for campaign purposes to any cabinet ministers or other members of parliament and, if so, to whom and in what amount?

This was the answer given by the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Justice:

The government does not have, on its own files—

I emphasize the word "own".

—nor has it secured, arising out of investigation into bankruptcy frauds now in progress in Montreal, any information showing that the records and documents connected with bankruptcy proceedings by Max and Adolph Sefkind and/or their companies disclose contributions for campaign purposes to any cabinet ministers or other members of parliament.

How important this is, sir, is shown by the fact that the Prime Minister issued what might be called the Prime Minister's "political primer" indicating the proprieties that must be maintained. Indeed, as an aside may I say that document was a colossal indictment of his colleagues, and it would be interesting to know the reaction of the ministers and the replies they gave thereto. We have had no explanation by either of these ministers as to what took place other than a general statement which, to say the least, has not brought about the dissipation of the veil of speculation surrounding these unusual, "un-Household Finance" transactions which might be described as "Beneficial Finance" transactions.

There are questions to be asked; there are questions to be answered. One would think the ministers would immediately agree that this opportunity should be given. Certainly we should find out, and the country has a right to know, whether the R.C.M.P. has made any investigations following the revelations that are taking place in connection with the bankruptcy commission instituted by the government of the province of Quebec. Has the R.C.M.P. produced any report in connection with this matter? If so, what action does the Department of Justice intend to take in connection with it? The records are available but we are unable to get them from the trustee

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

in bankruptcy, the accounting firm of McDonald Currie, because the trustee has no power to make information public on these questions.

What about the accounts receivable that appear on the records of the Sefkind firms? Could we be told what records the Bank of Montreal has in connection with this matter? Certainly the answer that was given on December 16 is simply a brush-off answer, and brush-off answers will not meet the serious question of ministerial ethics. So there is urgency, as has been made very clear by the hon. member for Pictou.

The President of the Privy Council said last evening that he hoped the session would end today. A few minutes ago the Prime Minister emphasized the word "hope". Whether it ends today or Monday or Tuesday or whenever it ends, there will be no other opportunity for parliament to consider this matter, a matter of urgency and even more urgent having regard to the serious view that the Prime Minister took in writing a letter to his cabinet associates. Indeed, that letter is one that ought to be attached as an appendix to *Hansard* so that all who run may read. It sets out the Prime Minister's view very clearly in these words:

It has been said that the elementary qualification demanded of a minister is honesty and incorruptibility. But it is not enough for us to have those qualities. Our attitudes and conduct must be such as to reflect them.

Sir, I am in no way casting aspersions.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I have not said a word that casts an aspersion. The ministers sit in this house with their lips sealed. They had an opportunity today to rise in their places and make the explanation which I would have expected them to make under all the circumstances. They sat silent when they had an opportunity. Yesterday the Prime Minister stated he did not raise a question of privilege because he did not have the opportunity procedurally to explain the situation. That was not according to the facts.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, a decision was taken on this matter yesterday, and perhaps the right hon. gentleman will observe ministerial ethics in dealing with it.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I said that the Prime Minister yesterday made a statement that he knew was not in accordance with the facts—

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, I ask you to rule on the point I have raised.