

Conflict of Interest

Mr. Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, Justice Parker said: "In my view, public disclosure should be the cornerstone of a modern conflict of interest code".

Mr. Stevens: What page?

Mr. Rodriguez: Justice Parker has said that that question of disclosure is the very essence of a modern conflict of interest code. One would think that the Prime Minister, having read this report, would in fact incorporate that suggestion into this conflict of interest legislation.

Mr. Stevens: Have you read the report?

Mr. Rodriguez: But it is not there. In the United States, they have full disclosure in their conflict of interest rules. In Great Britain there are full disclosure rules. In many provinces in Canada there are full disclosure rules. In municipal council there are full disclosure rules. But is there full disclosure in Bill C-114?

If the principle of the Bill is conflict of interest, then it ought to be based on a cornerstone, which is that public disclosure is the essence of any conflict of interest law.

In fact, Bill C-114 is diametrically opposed to that because it only requires Members of Parliament to reveal their assets to a registrar who may or may not make public any or all of the information provided by the Member. In fact, this is no disclosure at all. What has been inserted into this equation now is a bureaucrat. The bureaucrat and the Member will decide what, if anything, shall be disclosed.

That is not fulfilling what Justice Parker has said and has discovered in a very exhaustive hearing is essential to a conflict of interest guideline. What is being offered here is something called reasonable privacy of Members. That is a variation on the theme of full disclosure. It is not even consistent.

In fact, we in the New Democratic Party cannot accept that idea which is contained in Bill C-114. We criticize it for that because, in fact, it sets up a filtering system and some bureaucrat will filter what exactly the public should know. You cannot have a transparent system with that kind of filtering plant.

In fact, that is what is in effect now. The ADRG registers the assets. He does not have to reveal them. They are not public knowledge. Surely we should be aiming for something better than what we have had and what has failed us in the past. That is our first grave concern.

The second shortcoming of the Bill as far as we New Democrats see it is the whole question of requiring Members to make a public declaration of conflicts and withdraw from debate or discussion of the particular issue in which they have a conflict. When I was on municipal council, one had to declare publicly what the conflict was. Then one could not participate in the debate or in the vote.

According to the present Standing Orders of the House, the Member does not participate in the vote, but there is no public declaration of the pecuniary interest the Member has in the legislation that is before Parliament. As far as I am concerned, there must be a provision in the Bill that has some declaratory powers.

The third shortcoming of the Bill as we see it is the question of blind trusts. Again, Justice Parker has said—

Mr. Stevens: At what page?

Mr. Rodriguez: —quite strongly, one of his recommendations—

Mr. Stevens: At what page?

Mr. Rodriguez: You should know the page. You ought to know the Parker Commission report inside out. You should not be asking me the page, and I am pointing to Mr. Sinclair Stevens.

Why is he asking? He is better acquainted with Justice Parker than I am. He has spent more time with him. He spent more time with him, at my expense, so do not ask me the page. Do not ask me the page.

An Hon. Member: Go eat a banana, John.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McKinnon): This is creating a considerable amount of disorder in the Chamber. I would be most appreciative if the Hon. Member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) would refrain from using pronouns in the first person.

Mr. Rodriguez: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I observe that. You have given me a chance to cool down. But here is a guy on 14 counts—not one, two or three, but 14 counts of conflict of interest—

Mr. Brisco: A point of order.

Mr. Rodriguez: He spent more time with Justice Parker and he is asking me what page the recommendation is on. Buddy, what did I pay that lawyer for, who is now a judge? What did I pay Sopinka for? Let him tell you the page. Call Sopinka. I will pay the dime.

Mr. Brisco: A point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McKinnon): I would appreciate if the Hon. Member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) in the last minute he has, would refrain from using pronouns and speak through the Chair.

Mr. Brisco: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I do not wish to take from the Hon. Member's last moments in his speech, but out of regard for the Hon. Member when he is outside the Chamber, I remind him that if he exercises himself too passionately he may well be addressing the House in his last moments. He should have some due regard for his own welfare.