

Supply

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, on that same point, I take it that the Government is emphatically refusing its consent to treat this motion not as one of no confidence. Is that the Government's position?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: At this point the Chair recognizes the Hon. Leader of the Opposition who is, I believe, going to introduce the debate for his side today.

Mr. Nielsen: It is shameful conduct, sir, on the part of the Government. Obviously it does not want this matter to go to Committee. The motion is framed in exactly the same words as the motion put on December 10, 1974 by the then Government House leader, the Hon. Mitchell Sharp. I find it unbelievable that the Government would take this position.

● (1115)

What we are dealing with today is the question of conflict of interest guidelines as they apply to Ministers of the Crown. It would be useful to survey the history of what was done. In July, 1973 the then President of the Privy Council, who is now the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. MacEachen), submitted a Green Paper on conflict of interest guidelines with respect to Members and Senators. That motion was brought forward when the Deputy Prime Minister, then the Government House leader, had his responsibilities transferred to Mr. Mitchell Sharp. Through negotiations between the Government of that day and the Opposition of that day, in addition to a reference to the Committee of the Green Paper with respect to Members and Senators, a motion was put forward. Our motion today is couched in precisely the same language as the motion put forward by the Government of that day.

An amendment was moved to that motion on December 10, 1974, which attempted to place the priority of the Committee's work in the sequence of dealing with conflict of interest of Ministers and public servants before it dealt with the conflict question as it applied to Members and Senators. That Opposition amendment was defeated. The main motion, which included the words of the motion put today, was passed. The Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections reported to the House on June 10, 1975 in its fifth report. Certain action was then taken by the Government with respect to consequential legislation.

Notwithstanding that the Committee had met 59 times in four years subsequent to that report, it did not deal with the remainder of the motion. It is still outstanding, yet it was passed by the Government. Indeed, it had the unanimous support of all Parties in the House.

These are very important and critical areas of representative Government in any free democracy. As the Deputy Prime Minister said some ten years ago when he first presented his Green Paper, the prestige of Parliament relates directly to the manner in which this institution adheres to reasonable and responsible conflict of interest provisions.

There is nothing new and nothing unusual in that. It is a commonly held tradition in all civilized communities that those who hold public office should not be permitted to benefit

personally from that fact. Those in public office should make use of that position, not in any way de facto or by appearance for personal enrichment. That is the great underlying principle in any question of public morality.

I point out that the terms in which the motion is couched are precisely the same as the second half of the motion moved by the Hon. Mitchell Sharp on December 10, 1974. I will read that motion because it should be on the record so that the words can be compared. It reads as follows:

That the Green Paper entitled Members of Parliament and Conflict of Interest, tabled on November 27, 1974, be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections; and

That after the committee has concluded its deliberations and submitted its report on the aforementioned matter, it be authorized to consider and make recommendations upon the subject matter of ministers and conflict of interest and public servants and conflict of interest.

Anyone reading today's motion and the motion that was passed unanimously by the House on that date cannot fail to see the exactness of the comparison. In moving to refer the question of conflict of interest among various Government levels to the Committee, Mr. Sharp made several pointed references which are of interest to us today. He said:

● (1120)

—in the present situation, what we must establish within the Public Service, within the Parliament is actually a set of values that would bring everyone to model his conduct after a service to the public which is not what we have witnessed in the past days.

These are important considerations when the public mind is made uneasy by revelations that neither the guidelines of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) nor scruples of conscience have succeeded in establishing that set of values of which Mr. Sharp spoke.

What are those values? They are a sense of probity, a regard for moral conduct, a refusal to take advantage of public office for personal advantage. These are the parameters within which the conduct of Ministers, Members and those in high places in the Public Service must operate.

Canadians have been aware of uneasiness in recent weeks at revelations that almost an incredible laxity has crept into relations among Members of the Government and former Members of Government. It is perfectly clear that it has become common practice for former Ministers to be accorded preferred treatment by their former colleagues and former employees. It is no longer a question of one or two episodes but so many that it appears to be a normal and commonplace practice. If the Coalgate affair were the only one, and if the Ministers involved had taken the proper and honourable course and had submitted their resignations, there would perhaps be no ground, no great ground in any event, for concern on the assumption that positive steps would be taken to prevent a recurrence. This assumption is no longer possible, given the attitude—and that is what it boils down to, an attitude—of the present Government.

Since the Coalgate affair came into the open due to an interview the former Minister gave to the media, there have