

*Supply*

witnesses. In fact, I am quite confident that under the new rules respecting committees, this investigation can be carried out very effectively.

I am loath to think that we could send the matter to committee and have the same sort of thing happen that happened to the banks investigation. Remember the Estey Commission, Mr. Speaker? We have not heard about that for ages now. It seems to have disappeared off the face of the earth. I am afraid that that is exactly what will happen in this particular instance. I believe that the appropriate place for this discussion is in a House of Commons committee of peers. That is where it belongs, and nowhere else.

• (1740)

I should like to point out another problem in this regard. It seems to me that Parliament has really been on trial for the last 10 days. In my opinion, the kind of example which has been held up to the public leaves a lot to be desired. Right at the start the Minister could have said: "It looks that way. The information is out. Whether or not there was conflict of interest before, there is now a conflict. Now I know where my wife got the loan. The situation has now changed, so I will step aside while the matter is investigated". Why could he have not said that? He did not even follow the example of the Minister of Communications (Mr. Masse) who immediately stepped aside once the word got out that there would be an investigation into his election expenses. Everyone on all sides of the House said that it was an example of the way we should behave, that it was living up to the parliamentary principle of ministerial responsibility. That was an example which the ex-Minister as of today failed to follow. Even the former Minister of National Defence moved quickly to remove himself from a situation which could reflect upon the Government.

It seems to me that that is the kind of action which should have been taken. That is the kind of advice the Deputy Prime Minister ought to have been giving the Minister. Unfortunately it was not followed, so for the last 10 days we had the spectacle of Parliament being on trial in the newspapers and by media commentators from one end of the country to the other. As a matter of fact, Members of Parliament have been receiving telegrams. I received telegrams and letters from folk across the country who said that something was wrong and that in fact the matter should be looked into. It was not a matter of whether there was dishonesty; the fact is that there were appearances of dishonesty.

To conclude, I say that Parliament was not even served well today. Not to accept any responsibility, to blame the media, and to blame the Opposition, are not in the best parliamentary tradition, and that is most unfortunate.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Rossi:** Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the Hon. Member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez), considering that the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Nielsen) used the word "impartial" throughout the Question Period, whether he feels it might be more appropriate for the Hon. Member for York Peel (Mr.

Stevens) to be accountable to a committee of this House, so that his colleagues might be more fully informed of what took place. Moreover, I should like to ask the Hon. Member for Nickel Belt why, in his opinion, following two weeks of questions being directed in vain to the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister resigned this morning after wasting the time of the House for 15 days.

[*English*]

**Mr. Rodriguez:** Mr. Speaker, I will answer the Hon. Member's second question first. I can only offer my own opinion. I think the Tory polling company, Decima, must have done some polling, and the leadership, with the captain away from the deck, recognized that they could not win this one and that in fact the public was aroused. One backbench Tory Member from Quebec—and I will not mention his name—told me that he was embarrassed by it and that the Minister should step aside. I think the polling showed that right across the country they were not getting away with it. I think they also looked at press clippings over the last 10 days which clearly showed that the Government was being hurt by the whole episode, and that in fact the people out there understood in very simple and clear terms that nobody's wife can call up a bank, a lending institution or anyone who lends money, even a loan shark, and obtain an interest-free loan of \$2.6 million. Nobody out there believes that it can happen. In the eyes of many people, that is what they saw, so they judged the situation in very simple and direct terms. I think the Government, with its polling, press clippings and feedback from the back-benches, saw that it could not get away with it.

Now the Tories are into damage control. They are trying to control the damage by setting up an impartial individual to study it. We asked for a judicial inquiry. Who is more impartial than a federal appeal court judge? When we made that request, they said: "No way, José; we won't do that". We went to the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure, which has historically done work in this field. Lo and behold the Tories used every little parliamentary technique they know to say that we did not have a reference from the House and that it was the prerogative of the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) to appoint Ministers and to be responsible for them. They stonewalled there as well.

It seems to me that those are the reasons the Government changed its mind today and that Sinc slinked out of here. The whole business of an impartial inquiry is so much smoke and mirrors, as the Tories are so famous for saying. In fact the House of Commons must be responsible for its ethical behaviour. That is where it belongs; the buck stops at the House of Commons. We cannot pass off our responsibilities to some so-called impartial investigator who may turn out to be some Tory hack.

**Mr. Marchi:** Mr. Speaker, I rise in my place to make a comment on the heels of the Hon. Member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) because I think his riding, like mine, is largely a working class community. We in the House must