

*Private Members' Business*

Commons was not televised. Now the House is televised, what is said in the House. What I am saying now is instantly broadcast across the nation.

The media are much more instant in their reports. Reputations can be instantly destroyed with a few key strokes on a computer. Innuendo can destroy. That has changed. The public has changed. The media have been and are the message now because they modify perception of people about elected politicians.

I could point out the explosion in the number and frequency of contacts with people by the member to whom I referred previously. All of these provide more occasions for elected members of Parliament to be in a situation where there could be or seems to be, in the eyes of the public, a conflict of interest.

Let me give a specific example. An MP who happens to be on the board of directors of a trust company comes to the House and is elected chairman of the finance committee. I would suggest that is a potential for conflict.

Then the committee receives legislation on financial institutions. Now we have the appearance of a conflict, an apparent conflict. If that MP as chairman, maintaining his position on the board of directors of the trust company, participates and votes in the decisions of the committee dealing with financial institutions I want to suggest that he is in a conflict of interest.

• (2020)

This is in stark contrast to an elected member of Parliament who actually takes money to push or oppose legislation. That is an act covered by the Criminal Code.

I want to point out the last case we had, the *cause célèbre* of all this, was the Sinc Stevens incident. It was interesting to note that Justice Parker reported Sinc Stevens had not done anything criminal. He had not broken any law but there had been conflict of interest on 16 occasions. We had no legislation to cover that in this House, none whatsoever.

There is the transparency of the political process. We have had occasions on which we have advanced that transparency. When we passed the Election Expenses Act we recognized that it was important to know who was making contributions to the politicians and the political parties, how much, when it was made and by whom. We made that transparent. The first part of the transparency puzzle was put in place.

The second part, I would suggest, is when we passed the Lobbyist Registration Act. We turned on the light on a very arcane profession, those who wielded influence in the nation's capital with the nation's politicians.

The whole demand that I made on behalf of my caucus during that process was to apply the same transparency. The principle I used was that the public has a right to know who is doing what to whom and for how much. The whole purpose was to create the transparent environment so that the public had access to what was going on.

The third light we have to turn on so that we can create this environment and raise the ethical level—and God knows it needs raising in terms of the public perception—is a conflict of interest bill that in fact deals with the part of the ethical spectrum I discussed before: potential, apparent and real conflict of interest.

What is the cornerstone of all of these pieces of legislation? What is the cornerstone?

**An hon. member:** Disclosure.

**Mr. Rodriguez:** Public disclosure. Obviously members of this House are in tune with the mood. After an exhaustive judicial inquiry into the Sinc Stevens affair, Justice Parker said: "Public disclosure is the cornerstone of any modern conflict of interest legislation". That is what he said.

If members of Parliament think we can get away with just hiding these things, with having our own confessor-adviser tucked away neatly in the bowels of the House of Commons, and with taking the attitude that everything is for us to know and for the public to try and find out, we are barking up the wrong tree.

One member used an argument against this whole question of disclosure and said: "Well, it is only widows and Mother Teresa who will ever run for Parliament. If you do this you will scare off all these good people from running for Parliament". Then we heard the argument: "What my assets are is my own business and nobody else's business". Then we heard the charter argument, that if we forced spouses to divulge we would be violating their rights under the charter and we would have a charter challenge.

On the first argument against public disclosure, the one about only widows and Mother Teresa running for Parliament, it seems to me that Justice Parker said at page 350: "I was particularly interested to learn that the disclosure requirements have not discouraged good peo-