

Supply

That this House condemns the Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion and the Government for failing to provide full and satisfactory information on the blatant conflict of interest situation involving that Minister.

Mr. Jacques Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take a few minutes to speak to the motion before the House today, a motion moved by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Turner) and which reads as follows:

That this House condemns the Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion and the Government for failing to provide full and satisfactory information on the blatant conflict of interest situation involving that Minister.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment on what was said a few minutes ago by the Hon. Member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) who openly accused the Opposition of talking too much about the Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion (Mr. Stevens) and the conflict of interest matter during the last two weeks, while neglecting other major, national concerns that would otherwise have been discussed in the House.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the attention of my hon. colleague from St. John's East to the fact that during the past week, an impressive number of bills were debated in the House, including Bill C-96, an Act to amend federal-provincial fiscal arrangements; Bill C-107 which was adopted at all three stages and concerns the United Nations Convention on Foreign Arbitral Awards. Bill C-108, an Act relating to commercial arbitration, was also adopted at all three stages on May 7. Bill C-109 to amend the Income Tax Act was introduced in the House on May 6. Furthermore, during the last few days we have considered Bill C-45, which proposes unionizing the employees of the House of Commons, and even Bill C-92, which deals with petroleum interests on the frontier lands, was debated in this House.

● (1540)

Well, Mr. Speaker, contrary to the claims made by my hon. colleague from St. John's East, the Opposition has not tried to make the national issues discussed in this House take a back seat to the errors committed by the Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion. I agree, however, that during Oral Question Period, much of our time was taken up with trying to make the Government shed some light on this affair.

Referring to the attitude shown a moment ago by the Hon. Member for St. John's East, I would suggest he cannot censure any of the Opposition Members sitting on a House committee because last week on TV he claims he saw Members running after the Minister. I would remind him that he should have attended that committee meeting, for he would have seen a Minister systematically refusing to answer any question put to him, he would have seen the chairman of that committee in cahoots with the Minister to prevent any question from being directed to the Minister concerning his ability to continue holding his portfolio as a result of the fact that, at least in appearance, the Minister was directly involved in a conflict of interest situation, and he would have seen the committee Conservative majority endorse the ruling of the chairman who was thus gagging Members of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, the Government has already gone too far here in the House by refusing to answer our questions on conflicts of interest. Mr. Speaker, you should have been present at this committee meeting to see, not a Minister refusing to answer our questions, but the chairman of the committee, supported by all Conservative Members of the committee, deny us any opportunity even to direct questions. No wonder then that day after day the Opposition used practically all the available time during Oral Question Periods to force the Government into a corner with respect to this whole affair. It was the only avenue open to us. There was no other procedure, no other way for us to ask this Government to answer to the public and respond to our inquiries. Again I stress the fact that these two committee sittings were a sheer waste of time because the Government simply would not answer our questions.

In conclusion, my last remark in response to the speech of the Hon. Member for St. John's East is that the Conservative Members are hardly in a position to lecture the Liberal Party of Canada. I vividly recall being in this House on a certain evening during the constitutional debate when the Deputy Speaker, who was then occupying your position, was physically threatened by a few Conservative Members who marched right up to the Speaker's chair, fists in the air and shouting to prevent the question from being put on an issue which had been debated in the House for weeks on end. Therefore neither I nor any of my colleagues on this side of the House can be censured by Conservative Members who went as far as threatening the Speaker during a debate in this House.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, I should like to get back to current events which prompted the Leader of the Official Opposition to introduce the motion under consideration.

At the beginning of the sitting this morning, the Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion made an intervention in the House during which he offered his resignation. I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, that it was a case of too little and too late. I say that it is too late because, as the Hon. Member for St. John's East said earlier, if it had occurred much earlier, such as two weeks ago, many other issues could have been discussed in this House in the meantime. If an inquiry had been launched at the very beginning, other Members of Parliament would have had the opportunity to discuss many other issues of national interest.

Did anything special happen last weekend for the Government to reverse its stand so completely this morning that it would ask the Minister to resign and decide to hold an inquiry? Last Friday, during the Oral Question Period, I and the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans) questioned the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Nielsen), who answered this:

The compliance that is required is the compliance by all Ministers of the Crown with the Code of Conduct. I am required to ensure that there has been that compliance, and I have done that.

For the fifteenth time in two weeks, the Deputy Prime Minister replied that, in his opinion, the Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion had complied with the guidelines and the code of conduct.