

Conflict of Interest

conflict of interest guidelines. In any event, I must say that if the price of influence peddling is down to \$500—

Mr. Jamieson: That is just plain peddling.

Mr. Leggatt:—then I would be very surprised. In any event, I will not deal in an extensive way with that subject, which was certainly canvassed extensively last week.

I want to conclude by urging the minister and the committee when they deal with this matter to have a look at frozen trusts and blind trusts, and then to have a look at full disclosure. Within those three principles you will find that the public is more interested in the disclosure of assets so that they know that justice is being done, and so that they have access to that information. Then parliament will receive the respect which ministers and members of parliament deserve. But until we are ready to take that step we have not gone far enough in terms of conflict of interest legislation.

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I listened a few moments ago to a very eloquent speech by the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Jamieson), but I want to say to him that the very fact that he felt compelled to stand in the House and make the speech which he did is one of the strongest arguments that could have been put for the support by his party of the amendment that has been put forward by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield).

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): It was an eloquent speech, and I rather felt for him—I say this to him directly—because he confessed on the floor of the House—

Mr. Jamieson: Not confessed.

Mr. Broadbent: Admitted.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Let me finish that phrase. He confessed on the floor of the House to feeling a sense of embarrassment in the situation in which he found himself, albeit as he argued, and we could examine that argument later, he was compelled by law into this situation. But it is that very sense of embarrassment that a minister of the Crown should feel, and which this minister has confessed he did feel, which is the strongest possible argument for the amendment we have moved.

The purpose of the amendment is to ensure that in dealing with questions of morality or justice, in the fair and equitable manner in which the minister asks us to deal with those questions, the place to start is not in the complicated and difficult area of the member of parliament, the backbencher, but in the clear area of ministers of the Crown. That is the reason that we have put this amendment. But for all his eloquence the minister did not answer the argument that was made earlier today by the Leader of the Opposition. I think the proposition put forward by the Leader of the Opposition is unassailable, namely, that the higher the position, the greater the duty to ensure not only the existence of morality in public life but the appearance of the existence of morality in public

[Mr. Leggatt.]

life. That is the plain unvarnished reason for the amendment which we have moved.

I want to say to the House that I have been astounded by the speech of the hon. member for Vaudreuil (Mr. Herbert) and by the fact that he should say what he did and say it in the way he did, completely misinterpreting the line of debate that we have tried to bring forward today. But I was astounded more by the government House leader who, on December 6 in the House, appeared to argue that the special position of cabinet ministers, their special privileges, the important access they have to knowledge, do not place a cabinet minister in a higher position than a backbencher in the House. I cannot accept that argument, and no one else can accept that argument. That is not to say that a backbencher's duties ought not to be examined, but surely in the year 1974 we have not come to the position in this country—particularly this country—when people with these extraordinary powers and privileges do not carry with them a special duty in the exercise of their privileges. That is the point of the amendment that we put forward, Mr. Speaker.

● (2100)

Some hon. members in this House today have dealt with public servants. The hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent) said that the guidelines that were produced on December 18, 1973, with respect to the public service were not sufficient. I think he has a point, and the committee would have to look into it. It is worth noting what the guidelines say. Section 2 reads:

It is by no means sufficient for a person in a position of responsibility in the public service to act within the law. There is an obligation not simply to obey the law but to act in a manner so scrupulous that it will bear the closest public scrutiny.

Surely if that is the duty of the public servant who merely advises a minister, then the minister who has the ultimate power to dispense has a much higher duty. That is the point of this amendment, Mr. Speaker. That is why I think the government ought to thank the Leader of the Opposition for the thoughtful amendment he has put, and why the government, men and women, ought to stand up and support that amendment. They should not hide behind the smokescreen of women's rights or the smokescreen that was raised by the government House leader on December 6, or something that I would not dignify with the name of smokescreen, and that is the speech of the hon. member for Vaudreuil.

The responsibility lies upon all of us to take our duties in our hands, recognizing that if we are to codify what is right in the eyes of the people of this country we ought to start where the responsibility is greatest and the duty is highest, namely, with ministers of the Crown. I ask the government to support the amendment on that basis.

Hon. George Hees (Prince Edward-Hastings): Mr. Speaker, in considering this question of conflict of interest I think it is generally agreed that the important thing for members of the government is that they should not at any time be in a position where they can increase the value of their holdings by means of decisions they take in the particular spheres of activity which come under their direction as ministers of the Crown.