

Conflict of Interest

enough conflict of interest in respect to members in this House. It is darned nigh time that we started discussing the activities of members of this House before we start worrying about ministers of the Crown. This is dealt with in the document where it states:

Although some may still consider membership in the House of Commons a purely part-time activity, the demands being placed on Members would suggest otherwise.

I suggest that at this particular point in time everyone should accept the fact that this is not a part-time job.

An hon. Member: It is a full-time job.

Mr. Herbert: It is a full-time job. I want to go quite a bit further than the green paper. In fact I challenge the opposition to say that the green paper does not go far enough in the sense that if we are studying this we must go all the way and set the record straight in respect of everything. This is why I take issue with the statement that appears on page 4 of the green paper. It says:

● (1740)

To sever all contacts and to liquidate all holdings is a luxury which could be afforded only by those well established or by those who do not depend on such sources for security.

It has been argued with justification that extended restrictions on outside employment may therefore discourage many prospective candidates. I consider that to be garbage. If restrictions are placed on members' outside interests, it will be necessary to ensure that the level of remuneration here is sufficient to comply with these restrictions. To some extent the independence of members of parliament depends on actions of parliament itself. I feel very strongly on this point because I think that today we are influenced in the House by special segments of the population, and I believe that that is because we, in all parties, have great difficulty in finding the kind of candidates who will represent the interests of our parties in the manner in which we would like.

It strikes me as incredible that in a constituency such as my own, which some may say may be considered a fairly safe seat so far as my party is concerned, we find a total of 14 persons out of 120,000 who are prepared to put themselves up for election for the various parties. I think that this is a state of affairs which we have to face when we are studying this green paper. It arises because of the taint which presently attaches to political life. Part of that taint attaches because of the number of members who really have a conflict of interest in the other things they do quite aside from their jobs as members of parliament.

I suggest we should go all the way right now and say that members of parliament should not only divest themselves of their financial interests but should divest themselves entirely of any other income, any other job, and look upon their job as member of parliament as a one hundred per cent full-time job. On that I challenge members of the opposition, who perhaps as lawyers or accountants are working for companies that in turn are doing business with the Crown. In their case there is just as much conflict of interest as in the case of ministers who have holdings.

Also I suggest that when we talk about financial holdings as if that posed some real conflict of interest, I

[Mr. Herbert.]

wonder how many of us really believe that because we have a few shares in Imperial Oil, for example, we will be able to change the course of action taken by the government toward the oil industry. I feel that the whole attitude at present that has been attached to ministers of the Crown who have holdings which are supposed to influence their decisions is begging the real issue.

Either we accept on trust the word of every member of the House, or we establish a set of rules that governs everybody, not just ministers but every member of the House, and governs them to the point where there will be no conflict of interest because it will not be permitted to exist. Those rules must apply right down the line—severance of connections with companies, severance of connections with other jobs, severance of connection with any association that results in a member receiving moneys from any source whatsoever.

An hon. Member: What about farmers?

Mr. Herbert: Exactly that, we have farmers in this House who have large holdings, and do not tell me that there is no conflict of interest when they argue for their own point of view in committee. I am suggesting that if we are to be really honest with ourselves, we must go into committee and study this green paper which states:

A Member of Parliament is a trustee of public confidence and must perform and appear to perform his duties in a manner reflecting the highest degree of concern for the public interest.

That means that if we are going to set up rules, those rules must be complete and absolute. I challenge members of the opposition to accept that principle and not to point their finger at cabinet ministers, but to point a finger at every member of the House who theoretically, at some time in his life, will be in a position where he can be accused of conflict of interest because of an interest outside the House.

An hon. Member: Why not cabinet ministers first?

Mr. Herbert: I said already that I feel there should be no differentiation over what is considered a gross conflict of interest. Why is the conflict of interest of a cabinet minister any worse than that of a private member?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): You can disregard the rest of your speech.

Mr. Herbert: If we are to examine what is going on in the House, we should look at what is going on in committees, at what members on the opposite side are doing in committees. They have a duty to perform to this country in committees, but where are they? They are all over the country doing other jobs, receiving other incomes. There is a real conflict of interest, and that is what I am dead against.

Until we face up to the truth of what is real conflict of interest, we will not go anywhere. That is why I want to see this green paper strengthened and toughened, and I want to see rules brought in so that there is no further doubt. If we are not accepting a man's word any more—and I am prepared to accept everybody's word—then let us