

*Supply*

● (1730)

The Leader of our Party clearly put forward the Party's position with respect to conflict of interest and the role of spouses and dependent children. It seems to me that that is very clear.

Along came the Conservative Government of 1984. The Prime Minister set out his conflict of interest guidelines at that time. Along with his conflict of interest guidelines, he sent a covering letter to the Ministers, and the covering letter indicated the following:

I wish it to be understood clearly by all Ministers that they have an individual responsibility to prevent conflicts of interest, including those that might arise out of activities of their spouses or dependent children or the dealings in property or investments which are owned or managed, in whole or in part, by their spouses or dependent children.

There is absolutely no doubt at all that the intent was there and that the onus was placed on the Ministers. There is no doubt that in fact a spouse cannot run a blind trust. It says clearly in this letter that a spouse cannot do so and that the Ministers are indeed responsible.

It seems to me that that principle was reiterated on June 6, 1985, when the Prime Minister responded to a question put by the Opposition. At that time, he said the following:

—I would like to acknowledge that the guidelines are very much in effect and force, and that all Ministers are obliged to respect them in all ways, including appearance. We must seek to avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest.

It is obvious that the Minister had placed his holdings into a blind trust, but the blind trust turned out to be run by his wife. By no stretch of the imagination can that be called an effective blind trust.

The Prime Minister reiterated the principle again during the same Question Period. He said:

We view the guidelines with the utmost of seriousness. They must be honoured by all Ministers, not only in reality but in appearances to the contrary that might emerge, inadvertently or otherwise.

Now, that is crystal clear. There must not be even an appearance of conflict of interest.

Was there an appearance of conflict of interest in this case? The answer is yes, there was such an appearance. On April 29, 10 days ago, when this entire issue broke, the appearance was quite clear. Those guidelines then do apply in this case.

If the history of this matter which I have just outlined is fairly obvious, I asked myself, why has it taken 10 days for the Minister to announce his resignation? I asked myself if it was because the Government thought it could bluff its way through this whole mess. Second, was it because the Government lacks any sense of ethics? Is the Government paying big bucks and getting bad political advice? Is it the same old gang that harks back to an era in which all politicians did was to deny, deny, deny?

The Deputy Prime Minister comes from an era in which politicians believed that if they could deny something, maybe they could get away with it. Is that why there was such a delay? Does the group that runs this Government run it the

way Parliament was being run 20 or 25 years ago? Has that gang forgotten that television has come to the House? The stonewalling that we saw day after day for 10 days on the part of the Deputy Prime Minister was reminiscent of an era of old-style politics.

I think that group has forgotten that millions of Canadians watch Parliament and particularly Question Period on television every day and that today they cannot get away with what they could get away with back in 1976, 1958 or 1960. I believe that by and large, this Government is still led by that kind of mentality.

In this particular case, I think it was the Deputy Prime Minister who was calling the shots. I watched his performance. Time and time again, he answered questions by saying that he was satisfied that there was no apparent conflict. How could he say that in light of the history of this matter? In municipal politics, this kind of stuff could not go on at all.

I spent two years on a municipal council, and if there was anything even close to a situation like this one, one had to declare a conflict of interest and could not participate in a debate or a vote. What seems to be passing for ethical behaviour would be tougher to have passed as such at the municipal level. It seems to me that this level of Government which is supposed to be the senior level of Government ought to take a page out of the book of conflict of interest guidelines which govern municipal politics.

What has the Government suggested that we ought to do? We have made many suggestions here in the House. We suggested that the matter be referred to a committee for study. We asked that the Minister step aside. We suggested a judicial inquiry, but we were denied that ability.

What have we got today? We have the Deputy Prime Minister saying that we are going to have an impartial investigator. The precedent is that while the Prime Minister has the prerogative to appoint Ministers of the Crown and to remove Ministers of the Crown, in fact the actual integrity of Parliament is the responsibility of individual Members of Parliament, and the only place where that matter should be investigated is in the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure. Historically, that is the committee that has looked at these things, beginning with the Murdock case of 1924. The case of Bryce Mackasey was brought before that committee. He was a private Member of the House. The case of the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Fort Garry (Mr. Axworthy), at the time he was a Minister, went before the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure. The committee is quite capable of investigating these kinds of charges and it seems to me that that is where the buck should stop. We cannot pass our responsibility on to some impartial investigator, who may very well turn out to be a Tory hack, if the usual practice is followed.

It seems to me that Members of Parliament are the ones who should be looking at this question, not some outsider. The committee has the power to subpoena, swear and question