

Adjournment Debate

obvious to all Canadians that the position of an ethics counsellor was created to give the impression of ethics to the public. This is old style politics and it is a shameful facade.

Canadians are asking: What about integrity and ethics? The government's answer is to point to the ethics counsellor who it keeps locked away in a box until needed in the hopes that this will fool the public. A more appropriate title for Mr. Wilson would be the government's ethics spin doctor.

Throughout this whole affair concerning the inappropriate actions of the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the Prime Minister has been evasive and inconstant. Parliament is still unaware of when the ethics counsellor was contacted, by whom, what his advice was and whether or not it was followed.

I challenge the government to do the honourable thing and publicize the correspondence with the ethics counsellor as it concerns the scandal with the Minister of Canadian Heritage. If there has been no formal correspondence between the Prime Minister and Mr. Wilson, then that too is unacceptable.

The Prime Minister seems unclear whether he considers the minister's actions unacceptable. This is understandable since he had problems with ministerial conduct in the past. In 1971 when the Prime Minister was Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development he created quite a bit of controversy by contacting a superior court judge about a case being ruled upon.

In closing, this government is no stranger to unethical behaviour and inappropriate actions. In their own red book the Liberals compared their actions to those of the previous Conservative government.

Does this government realize it is setting a very low standard for ethical conduct and is failing to even meet that?

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very surprised that the hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster would use expressions such as scandal and so on to describe the situation that has occurred.

He knows perfectly well that his comments are inappropriate and grossly exaggerated. But of course he is trying to appeal to an audience that the Reform Party traditionally appeals to, claiming the usual virtue that the NDP used to claim in this House but even they have abandoned this pretence.

The hon. member knows perfectly well that what the government has done in this case is entirely in conformity with the red

book. When he quoted from the red book he omitted to mention the fact that the references he made and the quotations he cited from the book were taken from a section dealing with the obligation of lobbyists to disclose certain facts to Parliament.

We talked about openness in government in connection with lobbyists because we were concerned that in the case of the previous government there were dealings going on between lobbyists and members of Parliament and members of cabinet that were not open to public scrutiny. We decided that should be opened up and to that end we have introduced Bill C-43 to amend the Lobbyists Registration Act, which bill is currently before a committee as the hon. member knows perfectly well.

Under Bill C-43 the ethics counsellor is available to advise not just the Prime Minister but also to make certain statements to Parliament. He is given independent powers with respect to the lobbying industry. If there are grounds to believe there has been a breach of the lobbyists' code of conduct the ethics counsellor could decide to investigate and the report on the investigation would then be reported to Parliament.

Also under Bill C-43 the ethics counsellor must report to Parliament annually on the administration of the legislation regarding lobbying.

The hon. member knows perfectly well that is all contained in the draft bill. If the member had been responsible in making his comments he would have pointed that out. He knows that is the situation.

In fact the Prime Minister has accepted full responsibility for the actions of the Minister of Canadian Heritage in this case and quite properly so. He described the minister's actions as an honest mistake that was corrected by the minister at the earliest opportunity.

I do not understand why the hon. member will not accept that explanation. To me it is a reasonable one. As the Prime Minister said in the House in question period yesterday, the buck stops here. He is taking responsibility and no ethics counsellor can take that responsibility away from the Prime Minister of Canada who is ultimately responsible to this House.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 38(5), the motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House now stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m.

(The House adjourned at 8.16 p.m.)