

Conflict of Interest

government owes it to them to publish guidelines to cover this situation.

● (1620)

There is still, also, no clarity in relation to top-level businessmen who move in and out of the public service on exchange programs and senior public servants performing a reciprocal exercise. There is no excuse for this whole area to be left loose any longer. The government is not doing anyone a favour by diddling along on the assumption of some never-defined honour system. The government would not insult anyone by establishing and publishing guidelines for conduct at the most senior levels as its first priority. As it is, no one is protected; anyone could be suspect in a given situation. The onus is on the government to change that situation.

We do not live and work in times when the public feels really confident about any so-called honour system which is supposed to be operating in politics and in high levels of government. Why encourage further erosion of that confidence, when the appearance of proper guidelines could start to turn things around and help to restore some confidence? Public confidence is a precious commodity, almost as precious as democracy itself, because without it the democratic system just cannot work. To encourage it requires firm action and proper priorities. Therefore, in keeping with that belief I move, seconded by the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe (Mr. Wagner):

That paragraph 2 of the motion be deleted and the following substituted:

"That the committee be authorized to report on the aforementioned green paper after first considering and making recommendations on the subject matter of ministers and conflict of interest and public servants and conflict of interest".

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Drury: Mr. Speaker, would the hon. gentleman permit a question?

Mr. Stanfield: Certainly.

Mr. Drury: I listened with great interest to the thoughtful, and what I might call unemotional approach of the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield), but I was a little confused—I think the confusion is fairly prevalent in the public mind—by his frequent use of the term "conflict of interest" which covers a wide range of things. Parliament itself is a conflict of interest, and the way to get rid of that is to abolish the institution. I think I should point out that we live with conflicts of interest. The hon. member did, however, use what appeared to me to be a rather more significant approach than "conflict of interest," which was the avoidance of the use of public office for private enrichment. Would he agree that basically what he meant by conflict of interest was the offence of using public office for private enrichment?

Mr. Stanfield: No, Mr. Speaker. I think the definition given by the minister involves a very substantial part of the concept of conflict of interest, but I would not agree that it covers the whole concept of conflict of interest. I would just like to add that, even taking the definition the minister has given, the rules laid down by the Prime

[Mr. Stanfield.]

Minister are just as deficient as they would be if a somewhat broader concept of conflict of interest were involved.

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, in listening to the minister introduce his motion in the House this afternoon I was reminded of the old chestnut about shutting the barn door after the horse has gone. The more the minister spoke, and the more one looks at the government's proposals, the more obvious it is that the correct use of that analogy, with reference to the minister's speech, would be that he only gets the barn door partly shut, perhaps half shut or a third shut, after the horse has gone.

Unfortunately, the minister seems to be under the illusion that he has produced the whole product. The proposals brought forward finally by the government to deal with the very serious subject of conflict of interest are completely inadequate. First, the emphasis by the government is entirely wrong. In this we agree entirely with the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) with respect to the amendment he has just moved, and we will support it. Instead of beginning where the problem is most serious, with the cabinet, the government starts out with a green paper on proposals for members of parliament in general who have little or no power, as everyone knows. That in fact is referred to in the green paper itself. The real power in this government, as is the case with all modern governments, is with the cabinet and senior civil servants.

So there is a diversionary tactic on the part of the government, as was mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition, in getting us to focus on supposed or real conflicts of interest with respect to ordinary members. Instead of presenting the House with proposals or regulations which have teeth, the government has given us—I say this with care—mere cosmetics, a situation which in my view makes matters worse because it leaves the impression that a bad situation is being remedied, when in fact it is not.

Before discussing the three areas—members of parliament, cabinet ministers and senior public servants—in a detailed way, and what the reaction of the New Democratic Party is to each set of proposals for these different areas of responsibility, I want to indicate why it is a serious question that is before us, namely, conflict of interest. I think it is no accident that this problem has become more apparent in recent years not only in Canada but abroad in Great Britain, the United States and other countries. It has not always been seen as a major problem. First of all, there is the growth in government as a customer of business. Many government departments are major spenders in the economy: in fact, governments collectively represent the major spenders in the economy today.

The Department of National Defence, the Department of the Environment, the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources—you name them—at the federal level have a major input into the private economy. Second, there is the pervasiveness of regulatory, financially-supportive provisions related to promotional programs for the private sector. We have tariff and taxation laws and regulations, and major discretionary powers with the Minister of National Revenue effecting decisions as to whether to collect or not to collect taxes from certain corporations or individuals. The government makes DREE grants and pro-