

Supply

Aside from the question of the rules for Ministers of the day, Mr. Speaker, in various Governments, there are those rules for former Ministers. I believe there is an important point to be made in relation to the question of former Ministers. The system as it exists in any jurisdiction of which I am cognizant at the present time provides that a breach of any guidelines which exist, a breach of proper use of ministerial authority, can be remedied by the ultimate penalty, if you like, of banishment from Cabinet. That can be provided by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) or, in the case of the Provinces, by the Premier. There is no way in which this sort of punishment, obviously, can be carried out against a former Minister because he is no longer in the Cabinet. I believe that guidelines for former Ministers, as a consequence, must be dealt with in a somewhat different way.

I would like to say in this regard that when we are setting guidelines, it is very important that we take the long look at what is in the interest of the country and what is in the interest of public life. During the time that I was a provincial Premier and the Leader of a Party, I was aware of the problem of attracting business people into Government. I believe that other active Members of the Parties represented here have also been aware of this problem. Dissociation from their profession or business carries financial penalties for people who come into public life long after they become Ministers or Members of Parliament. Nevertheless they make a free decision to come here for the honour and satisfaction of public service, and they certainly should be prepared to make that sacrifice. They realize when they leave their business or profession to come here that they are not only leaving their business in the hands of someone who is perhaps not as dedicated and experienced and that their income will not be as good during the intervening years, but they also realize that when they go back to their business or profession they will have to rebuild and less income will be generated for years to come. But people do make that sacrifice for public service, and I believe that is very good.

However, after they have ceased to be Ministers and have left this place, to ask them to have fewer rights than any other citizen of the country to deal with Government is something else. I believe that is something which requires a great deal of consideration. I suggest that that is contemplated by the guidelines which presently exist.

I remind Hon. Members that the guidelines do not, and should not, say that former Ministers cannot deal with Government. The guidelines say specifically that "in any official dealings with former office holders, Ministers must ensure that they do not provide grounds, or the appearance of grounds, for allegations of improper influence". In today's complicated world, with Government into so many things as it is, there are few businesses which people can return to where there will not be some occasion for that company for which they work to be involved with Government.

Some Hon. Members who have spoken here in recent weeks suggest that former Ministers become non-persons, that they not have the ability to work for a company which has any connection with Government at all. I believe what is important is that Ministers of the day, senior civil servants of the day and

Government in general treat all citizens the same, that there not be special privilege for anyone. I believe that is what Governments in this country have strived to do. I consider it a shame that elected representatives cannot deal with an issue like this, which over the years affects all sides because Governments come and go, in a non-partisan way. But the hard, cruel facts are that they cannot.

• (1210)

Mr. Huntington: Send it to committee.

Mr. Regan: A committee is made up of Members of this House, elected politicians. Debates in this House in past weeks have shown that Members cannot put aside partisanship to try to deal with this issue. The temptation to play politics is simply too great. For instance, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition again this morning came back to what he calls Coalgate, yet he has not been able to show, nor has anyone else, that there was one ounce of special treatment for Mr. Gillespie on this project that he and Premier Buchanan brought to the federal Government for a grant under an existing program which was available to any citizen.

The Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain suggests that the guidelines and how a person complies with them should be made subject to the authority of Parliament. This, in my opinion, confuses the role of Parliament and that of the Government answering to Parliament. It seems to me that the voice of faction is seldom hushed here. If the House ruled on who is going to remain in Cabinet or who was in breach, or allegedly in breach, of guidelines, there would be—

Mr. Nielsen: They would all be gone.

Mr. Regan:—a constant flood of partisan charges. Obviously it is not in the nature of Opposition Members to think that a Minister of the day, whichever side happens to be here at a particular time, is as efficient and as exact in carrying out his duties as perhaps the Minister himself and the public would think. There is a vested interest in the Opposition obviously trying to become the Government and therefore trying to make the Government look bad. So I think when the Hon. Member suggests that guidelines be part of the Standing Orders of the House, that is not being realistic in relating the circumstances in which we would have the best impartial judgment on how these things should operate.

Surely the best answer is the parliamentary system we have. The Prime Minister of the day sets his guidelines for Ministers, and if his Ministers do not comply then he dismisses them. Remember this, that if the Prime Minister is found to be not doing that well in the judgment of the public, or if the Ministers are not complying, then it is the role of the Opposition to bring forward charges, as they have, and try to establish the merit of those charges. Indeed, if they have merit then the judgment is made on the Prime Minister and those Ministers by the electorate in the next election. But quite aside from the argument whether there is merit in what the Ministers are doing or not, let us not ruin the parliamentary system by trying