

Conflict of Interest

Finally, Madam Speaker, it is very important to be aware of the underlying principles on which this Bill is based, and of this Government's commitment to ensure that all Parliamentarians meet the expectations of Canadians.

[English]

In our debate today, we must not lose sight of the fact that the spirit of this Bill is in accord with the policies that have been adopted by this Government since it assumed office in September, 1984. In my comments today I want to set the context of the Bill in a wide scope so that Canadians will understand not only its important provisions but its place in the comprehensive approach our Government has taken on the question of integrity in public life.

Since 1984, my colleagues in caucus and Cabinet have been diligently working on a number of political reforms to ensure fairness and openness in government. I believe if you examine what we have done and what we are trying to do, it can be said that this is a Government committed to reform and more active in that respect than any of its predecessors.

I want to deal with some of the reforms that we have initiated and their implications for Parliament in particular and for Canadian political life in general. For years, the most significant development in our system of Government has been the perceived increase of Cabinet power, with the apparent resultant decline in the influences and effectiveness of Parliament. It is a favourite subject of editorialists. They lament the fact that there has been a loss of power by the Members. But I believe we have been the first Government in our history to try to reverse that trend with any measurable degree of success, and we have done that since 1984.

● (1620)

I want to point out some examples. I start with the McGrath committee. As a result of an exhaustive study and non-partisan effort—I point out this was a committee of all Members of the House and there were excellent contributions from all sides—what we did through that committee was strengthen the role of the Member of Parliament and parliamentary committees. We enhanced both the position of the Member of Parliament and his or her contribution and effectiveness on committees. I see here today the Hon. Member for Mississauga South (Mr. Blenkarn) who epitomizes what has been done by this Parliament and what can now be done by a parliamentary committee under the new rules.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lewis: Under the chairmanship of my colleague there have been far-reaching reforms with respect to what a parliamentary committee can do. We all know the leading role that has been taken by the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, under my friend's chairmanship, and what we want to see in the next Parliament is a continuation of

that role and an expansion of all standing committees. Members of Parliament will then have that sense of fulfilment that has been prevalent in the finance committee and other committees. That was the first step. The second step, and it has been referred to today, was to give parliamentary committees the power to review appointments, to bring appointments of the Governor in Council and Government before a parliamentary committee and have it examine the background of the person. Why is he or she an appropriate appointment for this committee?

I have to say there was some concern that we would find this process devolving into the way it is handled in the United States. I make no criticism of our neighbours to the south, but I find their appointment review process to be something I would not want to see copied in Canada. The appointment review system is a very good examination of some people. The Opposition has acted very responsibly. It has not called for every appointment to come before a committee. It has chosen to examine some appointments and not others. I think that has been healthy for the political process.

As you will know, Madam Speaker, the House of Commons now chooses the Speaker itself with a free vote by all Members. That was an excellent process and we ended up, I might say, as one of the combatants, with an excellent representative of all the Members of the House. Our Speaker has served the House well from the day of his election. And I think the election itself was healthy. We wanted to do that.

I have to say that there have been times through the process of appointments, and through the efforts of my friend, who was so energetic on the Finance Committee, when there was a little discomfort on the part of Government. There were things being done that caused several phone calls to my office. The caller usually started out by asking: "Why are they doing that?" I would try to explain to someone why they were doing that and the phone calls soon stopped. I think the whole process is healthier because of that.

I suggest to you, Madam Speaker, that there have been many other changes, minor changes, which have affected the way Parliament works. It is my personal opinion that this Parliament will be remembered for many things, but basically because of the Prime Minister's (Mr. Mulroney) complete and absolute determination to change the way things worked.

Mr. Rodriguez: Don't make me laugh.

Mr. Lewis: It is not difficult to make my friend laugh. It is easily done.

[Translation]

It is our objective to make the political process easier to implement and easier to understand for political Parties and their candidates and for Canada's electorate.