

Lobbyists Registration Act

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, I want to say how much I appreciate the comments of my friend, the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. I am not sure that he has helped me in future negotiations, but it helps my colleagues opposite understand what I have to put up with.

This agreement was worked out last week. The intention was that once we had dealt with this legislation there would be no more business put before the House prior to the vote taking place at six o'clock. We have a choice of calling it six o'clock or recessing the House until six o'clock, whichever the Chair finds to be more appropriate under the circumstances.

Mr. Murphy: Mr. Speaker, the Minister who spoke first on this issue wanted some indication of what we have left on our speakers' list. We have one more speaker and if it is agreeable we will have one more speech and then take the vote at that time.

Mr. Gauthier: That is no problem, Mr. Speaker. In our usual co-operative mood we would agree to extend the time to allow for that one speech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The lucky member of the New Democratic Party will be the Hon. Member for Windsor—Walkerville.

Mr. Howard McCurdy (Windsor—Walkerville): Mr. Speaker, far be it from me to impose any additional abuse to that self-inflicted by the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Andre). I appreciate the polite generosity of others in the House in extending to me this opportunity to say a few words about a matter which has not been exhausted in debate here.

I am sure that not even the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs would suggest for a moment that we have before us in Bill C-82 the be-all and end-all on the issue of lobbying. This is a matter of great concern to all Canadians. It was certainly of considerable concern to the Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedures which submitted its report some time ago and asked a great deal more of the Government than the Government has offered in this legislation.

My colleagues have, with a great deal of eloquence and insight, examined the issue of lobbying. However, I must say that after listening to the debate there might be a temptation to see lobbying as, by definition, evil rather than an aspect and a part of the process of this place which becomes evil only as a consequence of its abuse.

Therefore, it is perhaps useful for the electorate to understand the role that lobbying plays. Lobbying is a special word which is applied to the exercise of individual citizens' rights to petition their Members of Parliament, members of Government, or members of the bureaucracy in order to achieve some end. I think you would agree, Mr. Speaker, that that is a substantial and key part of doing our job properly.

You yourself, Mr. Speaker, have probably come to realize, as have I and my colleagues, that the vast complexity of issues with which Members of Parliament have to deal is far beyond the competence or intellect of Members of Parliament to have mastered. We are required to deal with an infinite number of complex, specialized issues about which we could not be expected to have expertise. It must be added that in many cases, no matter how well aware we are of the environment in which we operate or how well read we are, we may not even know that certain matters are indeed even issues.

When those who ask to see us, lobbyists included, initiate discussions on a variety of matters, very often it is helpful, and not only helpful but necessary in order to give us the impulse to begin the study and investigation which allows for the formulation of points of view.

This kind of lobbying occurs in our offices here on the Hill and may occur in our riding offices back home. It is frequent and involves ordinary Canadians, Canadians who have special recognition in our communities, the wealthy, the poor, labourers, employers, and women. It involves a whole spectrum of people who represent our constituencies.

One does not have to be around this Hill very long to realize the frequency with which one could accept invitations to very exorbitant dinners or fine cocktail parties or, in the case of one significant lobbying organization, an extraordinarily, exorbitantly luxurious party which people vie to attend in order to share the beneficence of those who seek to purchase influence to ensure that the directions chosen are consistent with the will of those able to entertain Members of Parliament at such a level as to bend their minds.

Members of Parliament, of course, have to keep in mind that they have an electorate to face. We also know that lobbying does not include only Members of Parliament but members of the bureaucracy not answerable to the electorate; those who write the legislation, those who can distort and bend the minds of Ministers and shape legislation to reflect, not the interests of the Government but the interests of those special interests better informed and better heeled, and who can determine directions in subtle ways of which we ourselves are all too often unaware. Lobbying is a normal part of the process of democracy subject to abuse.

• (1710)

The issue is that there ought to be full disclosure and transparency of the character of lobbying wherever it occurs. This Bill purports to allow intelligent people to determine whether questions should be raised about a particular lobbying activity, the costs incurred for that lobbying, the pay-off, who is being lobbied, and about what. Those are activities that we ought to be able to track down.

This legislation fails on a number of accounts. Its first failure is that it constructs an artificial distinction between those who may be described as professional lobbyists working for businesses that, for a fee, uses whatever means it has to