

*Motions*

want to strike a balance between satisfying the necessity of openness and not imposing on the system a degree of openness that makes it impossible for it to operate. Some activities must go on with the blinds pulled, not that they are scandalous, immoral or improper but just because they cannot be conducted in public. That is a simple reality. I think the committee came as close to striking that balance as it could in identifying the need to register paid lobbyists and not other lobbying activity.

We are all exposed to lobbying. Lobbying is what makes the system run. Without lobbying, we could not function because, brilliant as we all are, every single idea or suggestion we articulate does not spring into being in our own minds as a result of some genetic process. We learn from people who come to us with ideas, suggestions and recommendations. That is an important part of the democratic process. Indeed, lobbying is the essence of democracy. We want to ensure that that continues. On the other hand, it is important that the public believe that what is going on is not improper and that people are not improperly enriching themselves or improperly gaining access which others cannot gain.

Having said that, I would like to voice some caution. When we concentrate entirely on process, we tend to forget that ultimately, it is the results that count. It is possible to get a good idea from a very bad source who passed that idea on with very poor motives. However, it is possible to use that idea and come up with a final result that is proper. We must remember when it comes to things like government contracts, for example, that the test should be whether or not the contract is right, the taxpayers get full value for the contract, and in fact it was the best deal that could have been made in the circumstances. That is the real test and that is what we must remember.

We are here as trustees of the taxpayer. Our object is to ensure that the taxpayer gets full value. While process is important and while respect for the process is also important, we ought never, as sometimes we come close to doing, say that it does not matter that the decision was right and that the taxpayers got full value, the thing is bad and condemned because involved in the process were people who put forward suggestions or lobbied on the basis of how much was in it for them. That causes us to say that we cannot accept the results.

● (1220)

I do not want to digress too much into current situations and circumstances, but the 150 public servants involved have said that the decision which was made was the best possible decision. The military and public servants in DSS and other Departments involved have said that the Low Level Air Defence system bought from the Oerlikon team was the best system technically, was the cheapest, and had the best industrial benefits and highest Canadian content. It was the best decision according to all the people involved. I am talking about public servants rather than the political people involved. The losing bidders have said publicly that the system was fair.

They recognized that they were beaten in a competition by the Oerlikon group. The best decision for the taxpayers of Canada is now being cast in disrepute because some suggest that there was some lobbying in the process, some of which was illicit.

I raise this because I happened to be the Minister responsible for the Oerlikon contract at the time. I am aware of some of the lobbying which took place. The fact is that the process was impeccable. The decision taken was the right decision. Subsequent dealings by Oerlikon with others are now the subject of police investigations, as they ought to be. However, we ought not to get carried away in our analysis. In fairness, we should be able to separate these considerations and recognize that, in the final analysis, our responsibility is to ensure that our decisions are right. However, in order to maintain the support of our democratic system, the public must be aware and must understand that there is nothing happening which should cause them fear. That is why the registration of paid lobbyists is an important initiative which we are undertaking.

I am sure we will be able to produce legislation which will be satisfactory to all sides, but that is not without its problems. A company located in Ottawa which wants to do business with the Government does not need a paid lobbyist because its representatives can phone or drive over to meet with officials. Representatives of companies in Toronto or Montreal may have to take a plane ride, or they may send salesmen to make those trips. However, if you are in Calgary, Vancouver, or Halifax, and are of such a size that sending a salesman to Ottawa to do business is a significant expenditure, you may be tempted to hire an agent, as some companies do. According to this, that agent would have to be registered.

We then get into an equity situation. Does every salesman of every company have to register? I do not raise that as an insurmountable problem, but only to illustrate that we must draw a line. Every time a line is drawn there are people who fall just on one side of the line. They wonder why they are affected while the fellow right next door, who is not that dissimilar, is not affected. As I said, that is not an insurmountable obstacle, but I wanted to bring it to the attention of the House because the legislation which is brought forth will have to deal with such issues.

The committee recommended, quite properly, that there be significant penalties for violations. One would ask what a significant penalty is. Do we say that they cannot talk to anyone in Government for the rest of their life? Do we put them in jail? Do we impose a fine? That is another challenge which we will meet. I simply raise it as an issue which will have to be dealt with.

What about investigations? Do we want a system whereby people respond to complaints, or do we invest whoever is charged with the registration with investigatory powers? Do we want a system of licence numbers wherein every time a public servant makes contact with someone from the outside world they must ask whether they are getting paid and what their licence number is? I am told that in my Department that