

Minister of State for Finance. Will he agree to refer the circumstances surrounding the chartering, operation and bankruptcy of Astra Trust and related companies to a parliamentary committee in light of the fact that a federal charter was turned down in 1972, that a provincial charter was turned down in 1973 because the principals were found to be unfit, and in light of the fact that on Monday a select committee of the Ontario legislature found that it was influence exercised on the part of certain politicians in the Liberal Party at the federal level which resulted in the charter being granted to Astra Trust in 1977?

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Bussières (Minister of State (Finance)): Madam Speaker, essentially, the question which must be answered is whether there was something irregular in the recommendation made by the Superintendent of Insurance to authorize the chartering of Astra Trust. The Superintendent of Insurance has assured me several times that the investigation carried out before the recommendation was made was quite thorough and that no external pressures, whether political or of another type, affected his recommendation to the then Minister of Finance that a charter be granted to Astra Trust. In view of these facts Madam Speaker, I do not believe that an investigation on the circumstances surrounding the chartering of this company is required.

[English]

Mr. Rae: Madam Speaker, that evidence of the Superintendent of Insurance which the minister has just put before the House has been directly contradicted by evidence given under oath before the select committee at Queen's Park. There are dozens of references to interventions by Senator Stanbury, the then President of the Liberal Party of Canada. There are references to representations made by members of the House of Commons who are today ministers of the Crown, and the minister knows this. In light of this evidence—

● (1425)

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Rae:—how could he possibly justify not having a full public inquiry, when we know contradictory evidence has been given under oath at Queen's Park?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

Mr. Bussières: Madam Speaker, I am afraid the hon. member fails to distinguish between two levels of decision-making. One is that of the office of the Superintendent of Insurance, which is responsible for looking fully into the application and recommending to the Minister of Finance whether or not a charter should be granted, and the other is that of the minister's office. I doubt that it is a crime or a matter of exercising undue influence for any hon. member in this House to get in touch with the office of the minister and

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say: Listen, where are you at with this file? Or, I should like to know whether or not an in-depth study is being made of this file. I do not feel that it could be seen as exercising undue influence or as elements that would disrupt the work of an official like the Superintendent of Insurance. If that is the type of intervention the hon. member calls undue influence, then I have a feeling a large number of hon. members in this House will find that the volume of their correspondence will go down drastically overnight.

[English]

Mr. Rae: Madam Speaker, my final supplementary question is directed to the minister for whom I have the highest respect; he knows this because we have worked together. I suggest to the minister and other hon. members who have worked with him—

Mr. Nielsen: But we are not in bed with them.

Mr. Rae: I do not hesitate in saying that; I am referring to matters in this House. I say to the minister, in all frankness, that he is being extremely naive in this matter. This matter involves an elaborate scheme to bilk the citizens of Ontario of—

Some hon. Members: Question.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member should ask his question.

Mr. Rae: The minister has refused to allow the Superintendent of Insurance to appear before the select committee and, as I understand it, he has refused today to allow an inquiry to be held in Parliament. In light of these facts, how can we come to any other conclusion than that there is a cover-up involved in the activities of members of his party and members of the Conservative party of Ontario, which has consequences for hundreds of citizens in Ontario and their savings?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

Mr. Bussières: Madam Speaker, I must say that I have as much respect for the hon. member as he has for me, but I am somewhat surprised by his strong language which, I am sure, he will regret. The Ontario legislature committee had to deal with a company incorporated under Ontario legislation, and the inquiry focused specifically on the incorporation of that company. Even though the committee blamed the provincially incorporated company called Re-Mor, one should not draw the same conclusions about Astra, which was federally incorporated. The case is clearly different. Re-Mor came into existence after the incorporation of Astra and, as for myself, I am satisfied with the assurances given to me by the departmental officials, namely, that the charter was undoubtedly granted on its own merits and I do not see the need for an inquiry.