

Private Members' Business

Mr. Prud'homme: Mr. Speaker, I must say that the hon. member from Toronto, who read with great gusto the motion presented by our hon. friend from Nickel Belt raised a point which is of particular interest to those of us who are students of the Standing Orders of this House. I see that our table officers, the Chair's advisers and my old colleagues and friends, the experts, are all busy with their reference books, because this is quite an interesting point.

I was prepared to come here to discuss the matter, or at least to listen to the hon. member, because his speeches are always most interesting, brilliant and full of energy, and that is why I was here, even at this late hour. Since we are talking about conflicts of interest, I wonder whether he realizes that he himself has a conflict of interest because he is asking the government to consider introducing legislation.

In fact, the government did introduce legislation but it did not ask for a vote so that we would have as few constraints as possible in committee—and my hon. friend certainly had none, in committee—in order to present a bill that establishes conflict of interest guidelines for members and senators. Monday we were together all day, the hon. member, my colleague from Toronto and the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore. We talked about this all day and all last week. And we are still very busy, because Parliament has asked us to consider this matter.

[*English*]

Because of the devotion of our colleague who is putting this private members' motion forward, we are also discussing among ourselves the question of having tough guidelines that should regulate conflict of interest and post-employment practices for senior bureaucrats and senior political staff.

The more we talk with each other privately, the more we discover that probably it is the political staff and the senior bureaucrats who are the most dangerous people for conflict of interest and not backbenchers.

I am in your able hands to decide if we are not having a redundancy by debating this motion. I will listen attentively to my esteemed colleague to find out whether he

finds himself in a total conflict of interest by debating his motion.

Of course, I will abide by your judgment, Mr. Speaker. If you were to decide that no, he cannot go on, I assure my colleague that I will stay here until nine o'clock to listen to what he has to say.

Mr. Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, to draw this bow so widely that it is possible I could be in a conflict of interest is beyond credulity.

I have been introducing motions on conflict of interest since I was elected into this House. The latest one that I introduced was in April 1989. This motion has been standing on the books since April 1989.

The government's bill, Bill C-43 which my colleagues are referring to was introduced in November 1991. If anybody is in conflict, it has to be the government that is in conflict, not this hon. member.

I also want to point out to my colleagues that there was no opportunity to discuss this issue at second reading, which is the traditional way in this House of Commons. When a bill is introduced, there is a debate in principle at second reading.

I have to ask myself what this little exercise is about. Here we are with a motion. Here is an opportunity for members on all sides of the House to exchange ideas. Why are people so jittery about talking about something that we should be turning the lights on, conflict of interest.

• (2010)

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, I recognize my friend as an expert on the matter. I know that his motion has been on the books of this House for some time and that indeed the government may have stolen the idea from him.

I do think that there are some differences in the proposal put by Bill C-43 for pre-study by a committee of the combined House and the Senate and this motion. One example is that there is no reference in the motion before us to spouses but there is in Bill C-43.

I am just wondering, Mr. Speaker, since you are in the chair, whether you could not rule if indeed according to Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms, citation 173, it states: