

Oral Questions

Mr. Andras: Mr. Speaker, the reviews by ministers in various locations in this country were not on a formal basis in that they did not have the power of veto, so it is not relevant.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST**INQUIRY WHETHER MINISTERS TRANSFERRED ASSETS TO SPOUSES WHEN GUIDELINES ISSUED**

Mr. Heward Grafftey (Brome-Missisquoi): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the right hon. Prime Minister. Can he assure this House that, during the time he gave his ministers to put their affairs in order in relation to the conflict of interest guidelines—

An hon. Member: Order.

Mr. Grafftey: Just be quiet.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Grafftey: They are obviously very sensitive, Mr. Speaker. Can the Prime Minister assure the House that no minister transferred to his or her spouse assets which, if held by the minister in question, would put him or her in conflict of interest under the rules of the guidelines?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): No, Mr. Speaker, I have not investigated that possibility.

HOLDINGS OF MINISTERS' SPOUSES—KNOWLEDGE OF PRIME MINISTER AFTER MAKING PERSONAL INQUIRIES

Mr. Joe Clark (Rocky Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I should like to come back to a question which the Prime Minister neglected to answer the other day. I ask him now whether he has made any personal inquiries into the holdings of spouses of ministers, or into the contents of frozen trusts of ministers, so that he personally as head of the government may now be aware of any conflicts that may exist?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): In the case of frozen trusts, Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. In the case of the spouses of ministers, the answer is no except in so far as ministers in some cases did consult me about certain private businesses which their wives were involved in, or holdings which they were involved in, and told me about them.

Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain): Mr. Speaker, in the case of that kind of consultation, or any consultation that resulted from the Prime Minister's invitation to his ministers in July, 1973, to meet with him to discuss any possibility of conflict, was there any condition or situation brought to his attention which might have involved a conflict of interest? Was there any such situation brought to his attention either through consultations or from information received from any other source and, if so, will the Prime Minister advise the House, first, if the conflict which might have existed has been resolved and, second, who were the ministers concerned?

[Mr. Fairweather.]

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I do not understand the question in so far as I do not know if it relates to holdings by spouses or by ministers. Perhaps the hon. member would rephrase his question.

Mr. Clark (Rocky Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I am interested in any kind of conflict of interest, whether it is a conflict in respect of a direct interest held by a minister or a conflict in respect of an interest that might affect the minister because it is held by a spouse or any other person close to the minister. Has any evidence of a conflict been brought to the attention of the Prime Minister and, if so, what action has been taken as a result of that evidence; and, in each case, who was the minister concerned?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, in so far as potential conflicts are concerned, of course the whole purpose of the guidelines was to do away with such potential conflicts. I can say that I know of no actual conflict of interest. Of course, there were potential conflicts of interest under the general practices which have been followed for time out of mind by ministers and members of parliament, in so far as it was not prohibited under our rules or customs for ministers or members generally holding shares or public stocks. It is precisely because of potential conflicts of interest that I promulgated the guidelines and demanded of ministers that they depart themselves from the administration of such stocks or other forms of property.

REQUEST FOR IMMEDIATE REVIEW RATHER THAN AWAITING COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION OF GREEN PAPER

Mr. Sinclair Stevens (York-Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the President of the Privy Council. In view of the necessity of having an immediate review of possible conflict of interest situations involving certain cabinet ministers, and the need for strengthening the guidelines laid down for cabinet ministers on July 18 and December 18 by the Prime Minister, will he indicate why he has chosen, in government business Item No. 7, to have the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs first consider the green paper on "Members of Parliament and Conflict of Interest", and then only after the committee has concluded its deliberations and submitted its report may it consider and make recommendations on the subject matter of ministers and conflict of interest?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (President of Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I have indicated the argument for this procedure before, but I will repeat it briefly. We are all members of parliament whether we are cabinet ministers or backbenchers. I think it is important, if we are to proceed in an orderly way, that we first of all decide, as members of parliament, what should be the rules in relation to conflict of interest. Upon that foundation we can improve the guidelines for ministers and public servants. I really believe that if we were to begin otherwise we would be asking members of parliament to look at the question of conflict of interest of ministers, or in relation to ministers, before they had searched their own consciences.

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, in view of the minister's reply and the fact that members of parliament are not privy to knowledge other than public knowledge, while cabinet