

Oral Questions

suggest not impartially, about something which would be better left to the impartiality of an investigation of the facts.

[*Translation*]

MINISTER OF REGIONAL INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION—CONFLICTS OF INTEREST—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): As a Member, Mr. Speaker, it is I who should have moral leadership, not somebody appointed by the Prime Minister.

I would like to ask him whether he is prepared today to tell the people what happened in the case of the former Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion, whether there was a conflict of interest when his wife used his connections as Minister to obtain a loan for the family business. Is that a conflict of interest, yes or no?

[*English*]

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Acting Prime Minister): Well, Mr. Speaker, I choose to believe that most Canadians will endorse the course of an impartial investigation—

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Oh, no.

Mr. Frith: They are not going to do that.

Mr. Nielsen: —as to the facts. They certainly, in my judgment, do not endorse the conduct of the Hon. Member asking the question, of leaping over chairs and tables in committee to harass the Minister.

MINISTER'S JUDGMENT

Mr. Cyril Keeper (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Acting Prime Minister. The Government continues to say it will investigate the facts with regard to the conflict of interest. I wonder if the Acting Prime Minister would also take the trouble to investigate the judgment used by the Minister when it came to compliance with the conflict of interest regulations, which read that Ministers must prevent—

Some Hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Keeper: —real, potential or apparent conflict of interest.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The question is now becoming long.

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Acting Prime Minister): I would have thought that Hon. Members opposite would have anticipated as a natural matter of course that any impartial investigation would be conducted very much in the context of the conflict of interest code for public office holders, not just in one or two provisions, but in all of the provisions of the code.

CONDUCT OF MINISTER'S SPOUSE

Mr. Cyril Keeper (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the Acting Prime Minister is then saying that this

investigation will not only investigate the facts but will also investigate the judgment used by the Minister? And will it cover the conduct under this code of the spouse involved?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the conduct of an impartial investigation would naturally include the conflict of interest code for public office holders and would naturally include the Prime Minister's letter of September 9, 1985, to Ministers.

REASON FOR GOVERNMENT DECISION

Mr. George Baker (Gander—Twillingate): Mr. Speaker, on May 8 I asked the Acting Prime Minister to start the same investigation which has been requested by the former Minister, and I referred to page 4 of the Prime Minister's letter to Members of Parliament, which reads:

Obviously, from time to time, circumstances may arise that call for an impartial person to conduct an investigation as to fact.

The Acting Prime Minister said in response that he saw no reason for such an investigation. Could the Acting Prime Minister tell us what has transpired since May 8 to cause him to agree to an investigation which he said before was completely unnecessary?

An Hon. Member: Right on.

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Acting Prime Minister): That is very simple, Sir.

Mr. Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): Damage control operation.

Mr. Nielsen: I answered that question earlier today when it was put by the Hon. Member's Leader. The answer is that after assessing the week's events, and the fact that the Minister had been responding throughout the week and in committee, and in assessing the obvious dissatisfaction of members of the Opposition and of the media with those explanations, that brought about the action which was taken by the Minister.

PRIME MINISTER'S POSITION

Mr. George Baker (Gander—Twillingate): Mr. Speaker, two weeks of this Chamber's valuable time has been lost—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Baker: —because the Prime Minister and the Acting Prime Minister failed to act. Why did the Prime Minister and the Acting Prime Minister fail to act? Granted, the Prime Minister was in China, but China invented gunpowder. Surely he could have mustered another bang.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gauthier: Bang, bang!

Mr. Riis: Don't touch it, Erik.

Mr. Broadbent: Handle this one with care.