

*Conflict of Interest*

is evidence from studies carried out in other democratic countries of progressive erosion of trust in the integrity of government officials over the past decade. These data, while fragmentary, suggest that we have reason to be vitally concerned about the strength of public support for our political institutions. I suggest we are dealing here with a matter which touches on the very survival of democratic government as we have traditionally understood it.

Democratic government rests on trust, but that trust should not be accorded simply on faith. Those who seek concealment will inevitably be assumed to have something to conceal. Public confidence will only be accorded if there is public scrutiny. Private activities which have a public implication cannot be reserved from public scrutiny. Our sincerity as members of parliament will be judged by our willingness to apply to ourselves stringent standards and rules.

I am pleased that the government has seen fit to introduce conflict of interest guidelines regarding private members, but I am gravely concerned about the nonchalant way in which similar conflict of interest legislation regarding cabinet ministers is dealt with. Although the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) presented his guidelines on cabinet disclosure in July, 1973, it was not until December of that year that he promised a registry where the public could see these disclosures. Further delay of almost a year ensued because, in the words of the Prime Minister, "the registry was not ready because there was no staff for it nor offices allocated". Surely this is not sufficient excuse for such a lengthy delay, unless of course it gave the Prime Minister time to formulate his particular interpretation of conflict of interest legislation as it would apply to spouses and dependent children of cabinet ministers.

I would like to take issue personally with the way in which the Prime Minister dealt with this particular aspect of the guidelines. And the government House leader did nothing today to clarify the government's position on this matter. I may say, neither did the protestations of the Minister of the Environment.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Miss MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands):** They all failed to grasp the magnitude of the public concern which exists about political morality. The Prime Minister has demonstrated many times in the past just how adept and singularly clever he is at wrapping himself in robes of virtue whenever he feels vulnerable on an issue. For instance, he portrayed his heavy-handed imposition of the War Measures Act as protection for millions of Canadians, when in reality it involved denial of their civil liberties.

The country is certainly aware of the Prime Minister's tendency to adopt a deliberately simplistic and evasive approach to some of the most perplexing and agonizing problems confronting members of parliament and the Canadian electorate. Such an approach can do nothing but undermine faith in our democratic institutions. Nothing is more desperately apparent, in the wake of Watergate, of alleged corruption and innuendo, than the need to restore public confidence in the political process. Strict regulations regarding conflict of interest are a necessity so that those who are responsible for decision-making do not

[Miss MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands).]

appear to have any conflict between their private interests and their public duties.

How does the Prime Minister treat legitimate questions raised about the effectiveness of measures as they apply not only to cabinet ministers but to their spouses and dependent children? These are questions which are inherent in the public perception of the integrity of cabinet ministers. As one might expect from past practice, the Prime Minister treats such questions by deliberately avoiding them and distorting the issue. He grasps at any sort of camouflage, and on this occasion he reasserts his virtue by wrapping his indignation about the appropriateness of such questions in the mantle of women's rights. I should like to tell this Johnny-come-lately to the field of women's rights that in doing so he belittles the movement to which millions of Canadians, men and women, have dedicated themselves for many years. However, his newly acquired mantle of concern for women's rights is pierced through by male chauvinism. How do I arrive at this conclusion? I do so by noting the Prime Minister's replies in the House of Commons. Let me remind hon. members of his answer on November 29, when he said:

It is a position that the evolving standards in Canada are such that we could expect that a spouse will have a right to an independent career and activities. This position is not universally shared and certainly it is not the position of the Tory Party. Probably that is why they elected so few women members.

**An hon. Member:** That's right.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Miss MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's reference to women members betrays his own outdated preconceptions with regard to the role of women in Canadian society. The Prime Minister's statement automatically assumes that spouses are women, that cabinet ministers are normally male, and that their wives need special exemptions from conflict of interest legislation. What the Prime Minister fails to understand about the women's movement is that it is equality for which we have been striving for years, not special status.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Miss MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands):** What is the reason for the Prime Minister's reference to women members? I wonder how members of parliament who happen to be women on the Liberal side of the House feel when their leader implies that they have been elected because they are women. Is it beyond the comprehension of the Prime Minister to recognize that these women could have been elected on their merits and their ability to do the job demanded of them as members of parliament? Can he not admit that they are here because they have demonstrated, in the minds of the electorate, an ability and competence to be members of parliament? The Prime Minister's remarks showed complete lack of comprehension of what equality for women and the whole women's movement really means.

Why this sudden interest in women's rights by the leader of the government? Why this sudden interest by the government leader who, during his almost seven years in office as Prime Minister, has yet to enact a single, major