

Privilege—Mr. Axworthy

Upon learning of this fact, I felt it important to ascertain the full facts and present them to this House at the earliest opportunity so there would be absolutely no misunderstanding.

I am advised by the managing partner and the departmental officials that the facts surrounding these arrangements are as follows.

In September, 1979, a local officer of the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission approached the hotel with the request that the hotel accept the placement for on-the-job training of a handicapped worker under the special needs component of the Canada Manpower industrial training program. The hotel was approached by the employment officials because of its previous history in providing employment opportunities for handicapped workers, and because one of the managing partners had trained experience as a social worker in dealing with handicapped people.

In November, following a request by a teacher at the Prince Charles school for the mentally handicapped, two additional handicapped workers were given on-the-job training in the hotel. In return for providing training and supervision to these handicapped individuals, the hotel received from the government 85 per cent of a participant's remuneration. There was no additional subsidy or grant. The agreements were all signed during the period of the previous administration and were approved and monitored by both federal and provincial officers. These agreements were handled in a routine manner by the managing partners without reference to me as a limited partner. Thus I had no knowledge of these transactions until this past weekend.

Further, let me state, Madam Speaker, that at no time have I received any form of dividend, interest, payment benefit or return from my investment as a limited partner in the hotel.

I am convinced that, as these facts demonstrate, my interest in a hotel, now in a blind trust, did not in any way constitute a breach of my obligation as a member of this House. But I want to assure all hon. members of my willingness to bare the record and to conceal nothing about these transactions.

If hon. members require more details of these matters, I will be happy to have the issue referred to a committee so I may have the issue determined by the high court of Parliament.

If you rule that I have raised a prima facie question of privilege, Madam Speaker, I am prepared to move that the matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections for examination and report, if it is the wish of the House so to do.

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, this is, of course, a matter of the utmost seriousness and a matter of deep concern to the House, and I am sure difficult for the minister involved.

I have just received and had delivered to me a copy of the statement that he intended to make. I must say, and I say this with no undue criticism, that it would have been helpful to us to have received notice of the nature of the minister's statement on the question of privilege a little earlier than we did.

The matter is important because it applies to the standards that attach to the conduct of a minister of the Crown. I presume the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) knew this matter was to be raised today. The minister nods to indicate that the Prime Minister did. I am consequently a little surprised that the Prime Minister is not here in the House at this time, since the conduct in question does speak to the Prime Minister's own severity of standards in terms of what he asks and what he expects of people who serve in his ministry.

The Prime Minister indicated in this House in answer to questions from the hon. member for Saskatoon West (Mr. Hnatyshyn) that he was reviewing conflict of interest guidelines that were to be established for the new ministry, that the conflict of interest guidelines to be followed by the Liberal government were to be different in fundamental ways, and I judge from reading the record that they were to be weaker than those which applied to the government of which I had the honour to lead. He said he hoped to have those tabled in the House of Commons within a fortnight.

I believe that it is urgent that those matters be put upon the House of Commons' Table as quickly as possible since there is prima facie evidence in the statements by the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Axworthy) that these standards raised by the Prime Minister do not appear to have been as searching as they should have been in the case of this particular minister.

The Prime Minister said, in answer to my colleague, that he would rely upon the word of individual ministers when he was interviewing them regarding their capacity to serve in cabinet. The statement by the Minister of Employment and Immigration, as I read it, indicates that this information to which he now draws the attention of the House came to his personal attention after he had been interviewed by the Prime Minister and after he had been sworn into the cabinet.

That may well be a matter which members of the House of Commons would want to have further elaborated in committee or elsewhere, and particularly there might well be some interest on the part of members of the House of Commons in knowing the degree to which there was scrutiny, either by the Prime Minister or the minister himself, of all of the implications of arrangements in a partnership which already, in six weeks in the ministry, has been raised twice now as a matter of public debate concerning the propriety and actions and involvements by this particular minister.

Unhappily, Madam Speaker, we have too many instances of ministers even sitting in this House now, whose conduct has been found inconsistent, at least for a period of time, with their maintaining their position as ministers of the Crown. There have been instances with regard to the present Secretary of State (Mr. Fox), the present Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Munro), the present Postmaster General and Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Ouellet), and the former minister of public works, the hon. Mr. Drury.

I raise these matters not to review history but simply to draw the attention of the House and of the minister, who is