

Conflict of Interest

● (1020)

Last week, the Canadian Bar Association held a convention and a conference in Montreal. The main conference was on the limits of privacy for politicians in relation to the media. And a Member of this House, a Member of an Opposition Party, also attended this extremely interesting discussion. Perhaps since it took place outside this Chamber, it was at least somewhat unemotional and objective. There was a very worthwhile exchange of views with distinguished representatives of the Canadian media also present. It was clearly apparent that there was a fundamental problem, which I believe this Bill is trying to correct, because we all recognize more and more that respect for individual rights and liberties in a society like ours implies that anyone is entitled to his or her freedom and privacy.

On the other hand, we all know too that the press has an extremely important role to play in watching over politicians and what they do. But where do the rights of one stop and the obligations of the other begin? That is a good question, an extremely important one. So it is a dangerous situation if in future being a politician means giving up one's private life. I find that prospect horrifying and personally, I do not agree that we can ask politicians to give up their private lives, because without it, they would become monsters. You cannot live without at least some private life. I believe that it would be very dangerous to have people who had to give up their private lives controlling the levers of power. They could easily become unbalanced and lose sight of reality; they need to keep in touch with poetry, with nature and with the real world.

Now, this Bill seeks to strike a balance by requiring politicians to disclose their assets. If this is done publicly, it may violate one's privacy. A commission is therefore created to receive this information, which it will have to keep secret. I think that this combines the obligations of democracy and respect for privacy very well.

I see that my time is almost up. I will have to try to conclude. I shall conclude, if you allow me, Madam Speaker. We have a very important decision to make. I hope that we can set aside our partisan differences. I hope that we will not lose sight of the fundamental interests of this country and of democracy. I hope that when we vote on this Bill, we look to the future—the distant future, not the immediate future—not the future of partisan concerns, but the future of the public interest of Canada. That is what we are all here for.

Ms. Copps: Madam Speaker, just how much credibility can this Bill generate if we consider that the former Minister, the Hon. Member for York—Peel (Mr. Stevens), who was found guilty in 14 cases of conflicts of interests, will be running as a candidate in the forthcoming election, with the blessing of the Prime Minister? So where is the credibility in this measure?

[*English*]

Mr. Bouchard (Lac-Saint-Jean): Madam Speaker, I would remind everyone in the House that what we are dealing with today is a measure to establish a system which will look to and address the problems of the future. We are trying to prevent any Government—ours or Governments formed by other

Parties—from having the type of problems that we have seen over the course of the history of Canada.

I was a witness to what happened in Quebec. During the forties and fifties the Government of Quebec was very much considered all over Canada, as well as in Quebec itself by many people, as being corrupt. It was a very bad thing for the image of Quebec. It stained the image of Quebec. I was very young at that time. Many people like myself admired people such as Jean Marchand, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Gérard Pelletier, Claude Ryan, and René Lévesque. Many of those people fought against the Government then in power in Quebec, and suffered a lot from the image that that gave to Quebec.

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In Quebec in the 1960s and 1970s we adopted laws such as this one which succeeded in cleaning up the image of Quebec. For many years now Quebec has been a model of honesty. I hope it will always be the same. It is the case because people in Quebec had the courage to stand up in the House and propose legislation such as this.

Mr. Rodriguez: The Secretary of State (Mr. Bouchard) made a very nice speech. No one could disagree with some of the sentiments expressed: a clean slate, look to the future, bad practices of the past, and politics should not be image. Fine words!

The Hon. Minister belongs to a Party that made image the issue. Everyone knows in this country that the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) was a great believer in the image-maker. The Minister's presence in Parliament followed a by-election where the Government and the Prime Minister had stated we should never buy voters with their own money. He bought his seat in the House with over \$100 million.

When this Bill leaves so many loopholes, how can the Minister say "look to the future", when there is what we call the "Gucci" clause which eliminates the declaration of moneys loaned or advanced to Party leaders? Why does the Bill have the loophole that there be no public disclosure? Why does the Bill set up a quasi-judicial body, a bureaucrat, to decide what will be made public, if anything at all? Why is there no abandonment of the blind trust, after Justice Parker, with millions of dollars of taxpayers' money, gave us advice on what a Bill such as this should contain? How can the Minister talk about looking to the future when we have a Bill that is so obviously flawed, or is it just empty rhetoric and nice professional treatises about what a conflict of interest Bill should contain? I would ask the Minister to come to grips with those types of questions before lecturing Canadians.

Mr. Bouchard (Lac-Saint-Jean): I essentially thank the Hon. Member for giving me the opportunity to say what I think about a few things. First, those sleazy sayings about the Prime Minister, and the "Gucci" clause, and things like that, I am sure are some of the reasons for which many good people will always refuse to become involved in politics and serve Canada. When they see that those things can be said in the House, false things—