

business world. However, my question does not deal with that subject. My question deals with the question of women.

Is it the viewpoint of the opposition that wives of Members of Parliament are suddenly second-class citizens—

Mr. Nunziata: Don't be sexist.

Mr. Blenkarn:—that they cannot operate on their own and take business decisions on their own because somehow they conceivably might be in conflict? In this particular case, a well-respected lawyer who has practiced law in the Province of Ontario for over 25 years, who is involved in business deals, running fairly large public corporations in the marketplace, and who is involved with brokers and with financial transactions, is all of a sudden, because she happens to be a wife, in conflict of interest. I wonder to what extent wives of Members of Parliament are suddenly second-class citizens in the eyes of the opposition?

Mr. Nunziata: That is a sexist question.

Mr. Kaplan: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member began by saying we had to accept the Minister's word when he said: "I received no benefit". I thought when I heard that answer that it was a pretty cute answer. It was not a denial of the statement that his corporation received a loan interest-free for the first year and with no principal repayable until the end. If the Minister had stood up and said: "We did not get the loan. It does not have the first year interest-free. The principal has to be paid back during the term", that is the kind of answer which would have been responsive. But when he said: "I received no benefit", I thought it was simply a cute way of putting a good line on the record which did not deny any of the fundamental facts we were saying constituted the basis of the conflict of interest. That is why we dealt with that statement by the Minister as we did. If he had not received that loan, if it was not interest-free in the first year, or if the payment of principal was not deferred, I think he would have said that. That is why I think the facts are clear enough for us to make the statement and take the position we have.

To come to the question of how much is a wife independent when her husband is a Minister—and it is a spouse I am talking about—there are female Ministers and the same rule applies to their spouses. It does not have to be a Minister. There is no law which says a person has to take the responsibility of being a Minister of the Crown. It is up to them. But when they do, certain responsibilities flow through them to their families.

What is my authority for that? It is the Prime Minister of Canada. He is the one who said: "Ministers have a responsibility to prevent conflict of interest including those that arise out of the activities of their spouses". That is his statement. If a Minister or a candidate to be a Minister does not want to put this kind of constraint on his wife, if he feels it is unfair, if he discusses it with her and she is unwilling to do so, then he does not have to be a Minister.

Supply

The Government was elected with 211 Members, a lot of them better qualified to be Ministers than those who sit in the present Cabinet. There is no shortage of people to become Ministers of the Crown. Mrs. Stevens is a lawyer in Toronto with a good reputation, who is entitled to practice her profession, as is Ms. McTeer, as are many others whom I do not know, who are doing their own thing. However, as far as the Prime Minister's conflict of interest guidelines are concerned, the wives have to accept a certain responsibility for their husband's career in public life. Otherwise, these conflict of interest guidelines are thrown in the garbage. And I can see by the interpretation put on them by the Hon. Member who just spoke that they have been thrown in the garbage.

Mr. Nunziata: Mr. Speaker, I think it is abundantly clear that what is at issue is the moral fabric of the Government. However, I would like to make a few comments with respect to how the Government has dealt with this particular issue.

You will know, Mr. Speaker, that the Government, through the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Nielsen), over the last two weeks has attempted to defend the former Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion. What was its defence? It was that the Minister received no benefit and that the conflict of interest guidelines were complied with. We do not need conflict of interest guidelines to tell us the difference between right and wrong. Canadians understand this particular issue. They do not have to refer to a Code of Conduct, or to the Prime Minister's guidelines to tell them it was wrong for the wife of the industry Minister to go out and seek financial support from individuals and companies which were doing business with the Government through her husband. The fact that she was able to obtain an interest-free loan for the first year of \$2.6 million would suggest very strongly that the conduct was wrong.

I would like the Hon. Member for York Centre (Mr. Kaplan) to comment on the defences which have been put forward by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Government itself over the last two weeks. The Hon. Member pointed out quite rightly a few days back that it was the same Deputy Prime Minister who stood up in this House to defend himself over the course of a number of parliamentary days, who stood up to defend the former Solicitor General, who stood up to defend the former Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, and who stood up to defend the former Minister of Communications. The fact that all those Ministers ended up resigning would leave one to seriously question the conduct of the Deputy Prime Minister. I would like the Hon. Member for York Centre to comment on the actions of the Deputy Prime Minister over the last number of weeks, and whether his conduct has in any way served this Parliament or the integrity of the Government and this institution.

Mr. Kaplan: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to observe that I think the Deputy Prime Minister has disqualified himself by his behaviour in handling the situation to which my friend has referred. He has disqualified himself from performing the