

*Conflict of Interest*

Again, this is in the United States.

... will not be where they ought to be—above suspicion of using public office for private enrichment.

That is a very high test indeed to which to subject all members of parliament, and members of the committee will have to consider very carefully how far along that road they wish to recommend that the ordinary member of parliament has to travel. That goal, however, is appropriate for a member of the government, and I also suggest it is appropriate for the Leader of the Opposition.

Whether or not the methods suggested in that editorial necessarily achieve that goal is not the question. Members of the committee and other members of parliament will wish to discuss carefully and conscientiously how we establish the necessary public confidence regarding conflicts of interest or, more properly, the elimination of conflicts of interest, without unduly discouraging Canadians from seeking membership in this House. There will be substantial differences of opinion in the country and in this House on the question of how far down the road to the *New York Times'* position members of parliament ought to be obliged or be required to travel. Therefore, there will be substantial and, I suspect, protracted debate in committee, and ultimately again in the House, on this particular question.

The simplest area to tidy up—an area that can be tidied up quickly—and an area that most urgently requires tidying up is the position of those at the top regarding conflict of interest, that is, cabinet ministers. It is absurd that this committee, according to this reference, is required to consider and report on the position of members of parliament before considering and making recommendations on the position of cabinet ministers.

In preparing the reference in this way, the government is simply indulging in games. It is putting the resolution before the House in such manner as is designed to bury the question of conflict of interest for members of the government for many months until what I suspect will be quite a long discussion of the conflict of interest of ordinary members has been terminated and reported upon. Ministers must, because of their responsibility, avoid conflicts of interest, and be seen to avoid conflicts of interest. This is urgent.

In the rules or guidelines that have been given us by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) to date there is not enough recognition of the fact that the higher the position, the higher the standard that must be demanded. On the contrary, as far as ministers are concerned, the government has demonstrated in recent weeks quite an opposite approach. We heard the government House leader, for example, the other day and again today, on the question of campaign donations, suggesting that a minister of the Crown should be under no different guidelines regarding contributions and, presumably, gifts than an ordinary member of parliament. The government has shown that it considers itself, as far as the cabinet is concerned, to be a kind of nobility, above reproach and therefore beyond criticism, by its own decree.

What would have happened to someone, say, at the assistant deputy minister level in the Department of National Health and Welfare who might have taken a privately-owned jet on a visit to a foreign country on what he

[Mr. Stanfield.]

claimed to be official business? What would have been the assessment of a senior public servant who did that, or something like it? For someone in the self-decreed, high quarter of the cabinet it is not a serious matter. Is that not rather a pitiable double standard? Is it not rather incredible that these people in the government continue to say, or at least continue to say that they think this kind of thing really does not involve a really serious conflict of interest?

I do not think that is acceptable. Members who sit with me on this side of the House do not think it is acceptable, and I believe a lot of members on the other side of the House do not think it is acceptable. Indeed, there are not many people around who would think it is acceptable. Yet this Prime Minister and his cabinet stubbornly insist it is not serious, and they are really suggesting that they will continue to do pretty well what they please. That, sir, is really what this debate today is all about.

Surely, standards of conduct must be set for the ministry before we can expect any renewal of public confidence in the system and before anybody can expect the application of standards to anybody else outside the ministry. When I talk of the ministry in this way, I mean it in broad terms, in terms of the high office group as a whole. In that group are the ministers themselves, who should set an example of excellence in their own conduct.

Ground rules for this entire high level group should be dealt with as a matter of first priority in tackling the whole area of conflict of interest. You just cannot take the attitude which the Prime Minister seems to take of, "Oh, well, as far as members of the cabinet are concerned, they are all okay or I would have not let them in the cabinet in the first place. So we will leave off worrying about them until everybody else is taken care of". Ministers and others in this ministry level group of appointees should receive first consideration when approaching a clean-up of conflict of interest problems. I hope that we can persuade this government of this today.

I hope we can yet persuade the government that what it proposes by way of a so-called frozen trust which is permissible for the Prime Minister and members of the government is not of any consequence unless accompanied by disclosure. I fail to understand how a frozen trust as such, of which the minister concerned or the Prime Minister knows the content, constitutes any protection against conflict of interest. I say there has to be either disclosure or a completely blind trust. As I said earlier when speaking of myself, I have come to the conclusion that there is no alternative because almost weekly cases of conflict of interest would arise for me in this House when discussing matters if I had knowledge of anything I owned, that my wife owned or my minor children owned. The frozen trust is a lot of nonsense. I hope we can achieve some recognition that the spouses and minor children of cabinet ministers must be included in the guidelines which cover broad holdings.

● (1610)

The President of the Privy Council (Mr. Sharp) brags that the government's guidelines are the best in the world. I do not think he has looked very far outside Ottawa when he says that. The Ontario government, for example, uses a