

Supply

particularly with reference to spouses. It seems to me that those of us who accept the equality argument that there ought to be equal division of assets between spouses, something which is long overdue in this country, have to accept the corollary of that, which is that a marriage is in part an economic unit and therefore any effective guidelines for Ministers must have detailed specific reference to their spouses.

I also suggest that the committee look at the need for tougher regulations pertinent to blind trusts. For example, if a Minister puts shares in a trust, he or she ought to assume that those shares are still there and that the Minister has a financial interest in what happens to them unless informed that they have been sold. That kind of requirement exists in the United States where there are tougher trust guidelines.

The final suggestion I make is that the suggestion of the Sharp-Starr task force that there ought to be a person independent of the Prime Minister responsible for enforcement of conflict of interest guidelines be looked at with a great deal of care by the committee. It seems to us to have a lot of merit.

In conclusion, this has been a messy, unpleasant business involving the resignation of a Minister of the Crown. I suppose the only good news that has come out of all this is that the Parliament of Canada does an effective job from time to time.

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but commence my remarks today with something on which I wish to touch later on. I think the speeches we have heard up to now were prepared in advance of the announcement made by my colleague, the Hon. former Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion. Unfortunately, in my humble estimation, the speeches did not reflect that and were made to be delivered in any event, still full of all the weaknesses and deficiencies with respect to this issue that prevailed in the Opposition approach during the course of this debate.

Some Hon. Members: Blame everybody else.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Hon. Members are saying that I blame everybody else. Unfortunately, I think that that is precisely what the Opposition has been doing over the course of the last two weeks.

In preparing for today's debate, I took time to reflect on the events of the past few days and the terms of the motion put by the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) this morning. I doubt that any Member could participate in this debate without stopping to consider the importance of this institution and our role in it. Without wanting to over-simplify the matter or to run the risk of seeming trite, I believe that we have to remind ourselves from time to time of the central principles of public service and the public good which must govern our deliberations in this place.

The charges, innuendo and political manoeuvrings which have dominated the House and its committees in the past two

weeks have added what I consider to be a particularly unedifying chapter to parliamentary history. In a sense this is understandable because the strategies employed have centred on short-term issues, the inevitable by-product of the political process.

• (1200)

The House of Commons is a place of strong feelings, focused issues, harsh critiques, and fleeting concerns. This means that all too often it becomes a cathedral of the here and now. Debate on significant issues becomes reduced to black and white assertions of dogma which serve neither to provide new insights nor to contribute to national reconciliation. However, I do not believe that this is an inescapable pattern. Moreover, I think the Canadian public has the right to expect better of us. Indeed, Canadians have a right not only to expect the very best of each of us but have a responsibility to accept nothing less.

Keeping those responsibilities in mind, the actions of Members in the past few days bear most lamentable testimony to the public trust vested in Parliament. It would be presumptuous of me to attempt to speak for all Members, but I believe my experiences since first coming to this place as a political assistant in the 1950s, and subsequently, have left me with a clear perspective on service in the House. A large part of my political experience was gained while in opposition. I understand what it means to have to spend one's day looking for issues which will capture media attention.

[*Translation*]

I understand it may be necessary to find topics that are easily condensed into 20-second items for the national news. I also realize it is easier to sell sensational news than substance. However, I am sure that in the final instance, the public will judge not only the Government's mistakes and achievements but also the Opposition's actions and its proposals for intelligent alternatives. This last item is essential if we are to maintain a healthy parliamentary system. Without debates on substance, Parliament will be useless.

[*English*]

Looking back to the sense of renewal, optimism, and national purpose which prevailed at the outset of the Diefenbaker mandate, and indeed that of subsequent administrations, I am struck with the sense of purpose and vision that each new administration brings to this place. That vision cannot be sustained for long in the face of obstructive and unrelenting negative opposition. When in this manner Parliament allows the transitory issues of the day to divert it from its original mandate, it fails all Canadians—

Mr. Nunziata: Look at yourself in the mirror.

Mr. Cassidy: Look in the mirror.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Hon. Members listened attentively to the speeches of the first two Leaders. It seems to me that the same courtesy is appropriate.