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Former MP continues anti-graft crusade

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As a young man, Roy Cullen perused the books of an oil firm doing business in Indonesia.

The articling chartered accountant was asked to confirm the accuracy of certain calculations. The numbers added up, but he became curious as to their purpose.

He learned to his dismay that the large sums - millions of dollars - were being placed in a Swiss bank account for the benefit of an Indonesian general.

Many years later, after a career in the British Columbia public service, Mr. Cullen won a by-election for the Liberals in a Toronto-area riding, taking a seat in the House of Commons. He chaired the standing committee on finance and served as a parliamentary secretary to the finance minister. A numbers guy, he helped design and implement Canada's laws against money laundering.

He was staggered by the amounts of dirty money floating around the globe.

"Huge sums of money," he said. "Absolutely obscene."

Feeling exasperated, not sure how to battle the scourge, he accepted an invitation a decade ago to join the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption.

(I know what you're thinking: Parliamentarians Against Corruption sounds like Gluttons Against Ice Cream. "An oxymoron!" Mr. Cullen whooped when this was pointed out. He's one pol with a sense of humour about his former profession. "We're careful about who comes in. We've got a good vetting system. ")

Mr. Cullen moved back to Victoria two years ago, having retired from the House with a perfect election record of 5-0.

He is now a semi-retired public-policy consultant, having settled into a home in a gated community near Christmas Hill and taken out a membership at the Uplands Golf Club.

From this comfortable perch, he maintains a crusade against corrupt leaders and the kleptocracies he says doom millions of people to a lifetime of poverty.

His group chases bigger fish than petty officials. "Petty bribery is bad enough," he said. "These officials aren't paid anything, or so little, they're expected to take bribes - 50 bucks to get a permit. A little bit here, a little bit there.

"What we focus on in GOPAC is big ticket corruption."

There is no shortage of villains. A global rogues' gallery of crooks and grafters rolls off his tongue, from the late Sani Abacha (Nigeria) to deceased Mobutu Sese Seko (Zaire), from the late Ferdinand Marcos (Philippines) to retired Daniel Arap Moi (Kenya).

If corrupt leaders were not ripping off the public purse, Mr. Cullen argues, the quality of life would improve for people who now have no opportunity to leave the ranks of the poor. His first book, *The Poverty of Corrupt Nations* (Blue Butterfly Books), outlined solutions to make corruption that much more difficult in Third World nations - a free press, less red tape, an independent judiciary, better pay for civil servants, and more power to parliamentarians at the expense of the executive branch. *The Literary Review* of Canada called the author's plan "a mostly sensible agenda."

His second book, *Beyond Question Period*, combines explanations of how a bill is passed with personal anecdotes about his experiences on the campaign trail as a Liberal in Etobicoke North.

He first ran for public office in 1996 after working as an assistant deputy forests minister in B.C. and as a vice-president of a forestry company.

Mr. Cullen will be chairing a meeting in Paris at the end of September on money laundering. Delegates, including elected officials from around the world, will be briefed by experts from Interpol, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. The Parliamentarians Against Corruption are preparing a handbook for parliamentarians who are "frustrated, annoyed and angry about the laundering of corrupt money." The group has already helped Kyrgyzstan prepare anti-money laundering legislation.

It is a complicated task.

"When it comes to money laundering," Mr. Cullen said, "I know enough about it that I know that I know very little about it."

He was asked if he had ever forked over "tea money" in Thailand? Or been nipped by a policeman looking for a mordida (little bite) in Mexico? Or greased a palm south of the 49th?

"I never have and I never will," he vows.

If only it was that easy with all politicians.