

Supply

practice in Parliament. This in turn should provide this House with all existing data on public opinion available in Canada. He seemed to be somewhat critical of opinion polls being taken, although his own party, when they were the government, also made surveys.

● (2010)

Yet, members on both sides of the House use public funds made available to them, for householder mailings to conduct polls. They do so with the taxpayers' money, and they do not have to release the results of each one of these polls. On the other hand, the government has agreed as a rule, to make such polls public. There is nothing secret or magical about all these polls. The hon. member is asking us to set up an independent body to hear complaints about government advertising. Frankly, if he has any complaint about government advertising, he just has to refer them to the minister responsible. At this time, each minister is responsible for the publicity of his own department and I am aware of no case of fraudulent publicity by the federal government. Hon. members opposite would be the first to get worked up and to denounce us in the House if this occurred. In fact, if our publicity is improper, they have a privileged forum to denounce us.

I do not see why we should set up other independent bodies to do something or other. It goes somewhat against the principles of the members opposite to increase the size of the public service and I really believe that it is not necessary to have an independent body. If the hon. member is aware of cases of fraudulent publicity, the Secretary of State and the minister responsible will be glad to analyse the problem and revise such advertising if mistakes have been made. Finally, the hon. member objected to government advertising on the basis of morality. Let us talk about morality! How can the hon. member dare say that the government shows a lack of morality in its publicity when his own party was really guilty of fraudulent advertising on all the campuses during the negotiations on post-secondary education? And I can see the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald), who not only supported this fraudulent publicity, but also repeated at every possible opportunity that there would be major cutbacks which would affect the students when we know that the minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) has increased post-secondary education financing by 13 per cent. I think that this is really a case of fraudulent advertising, and if the hon. member is really interested in morality, he should complain to his own party for making such statements for several weeks in all the student newspapers of Canada. How can they speak about ethics? If we had to rely on their own ethical standards, we would dream up all kinds of things.

Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that any responsible government has the duty to make the people aware of what it does for them. I believe that any responsible government has the duty to tell the public: Your tax money goes to pay for such and

such a program and you can use it. If only a small group of people knows about the programs and can use them, this means that we have a useless government of the conservative type. That is just about what the members opposite are now suggesting in their motion. They are asking us to inform the people as little as possible: To economize, do not tell the people what you are doing, because you could be showing partisanship.

First of all, the hon. member's argument to the effect that this whole advertising campaign of some \$60 million is used only to promote the Liberal Party or the party in power is not really valid, and it is somewhat self-defeating. Let him just reflect upon the recent Gallup poll on the popularity of political parties in Canada, and he will see that we do not use this instrument as a propaganda vehicle, as he is trying to suggest. I believe that to carry out its mandate, a government must follow certain principles in advertising. First of all, it must be recognized that the Canadian public is entitled to full and complete information, in accordance, of course, with the Official Languages Act. I know that members opposite find this somewhat disturbing, but it allows people to exercise their rights as citizens and to participate fully in the democratic process, because without information, democracy becomes something of a farce, and I am convinced that information given to the public by the government through advertising promotes democracy.

A short while ago, the hon. member went so far as to say that in a way publicity does restrict the freedom of the press; I say to him that the contrary is true because thanks to publicity, the press can write even more, radio and television stations can survive. If that is suppressing the freedom of the press, then I think the hon. member and his friends opposite know absolutely nothing about how the press gets to be financed in Canada. They have so few ideas that when they were in government—we all know Canada has an ethnic press representing quite a few groups who depend on government publicity to survive, whether it be the francophone press outside Quebec, or that of the various ethnic groups in Canada—as I was saying at the time when they were in government they applied those infamous principles to such an extent that the decrease in their demands on the ethnic press threatened the means of survival of several ethnic newspapers in Canada. By chance, after nine months, we managed to get rid of them. Several ethnic publications would have gone down the drain had we followed the example set by that government.

Mr. Speaker, surely it is the government's responsibility to give Canadians information pertaining to its proposed policies. In many cases, we are able to submit proposals through advertising to the Canadian people, who, in their turn, provide some feedback not only for Liberal MPs, but for members of the opposition as well. The reason why I contend this government advertising is not an instrument of partisan politics, is