

Supply

Again, I do not want to discuss family relationships. The fact that the contract we have heard so much discussion about and which is referred to in the motion was not tendered is not an issue which I intend to address. It seems to me that those facts—the relationships the lack of tender and so on—speak for themselves.

Indeed, they speak eloquently about the attitude of the Government which Canadians elected on September 4 toward patronage and toward rewarding the faithful. I understand from the latest count that the sacred pigs now exceed 1200 in number. That is also not the issue I wish to address this afternoon.

[Translation]

I would like to highlight some of the important facts in this case, to assess the lack of efficiency in administering departments under the Progressive Conservative Government. Mr. Speaker, first of all I may recall that last September, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) retained the services of Mr. Douglas Robson, Vice-President of Lawson Murray Ltd., a Toronto advertising agency. It seems Mr. Robson was retained to help organize the Minister's office. I may also point out, by the way, that Mr. Robson still is President of the Progressive Conservative Riding Association in the riding of the Minister of Finance.

It should also be pointed out that the President of the company, Mr. Douglas Lawson, is a brother-in-law of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) and that his wife, the Minister's sister, sits on the board of directors of the company.

Mr. Robson was in the Minister's office, according to what we have heard here in the House of Commons, from September 17 until at least the end of October. It was "approximately" the end of October. That might mean some time in November, the end of the month or a week before or after, we do not really know, and I would like to have clarified. During that time, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Robson was not paid by the Government of Canada, although it seems there was a verbal agreement. In fact the Minister said as much in answer to a question in the House and I quote:

We had a verbal understanding that he would be paid, and in fact he was not paid.

So he was not paid by the Government during that period.

Mr. Speaker, another fact is that Mr. Robson was sworn in, that is, he was bound by an oath of secrecy, but he never signed the conflict of interest guidelines, which I think should be a basic requirement for people in exceptional employment. And then a few days later, Lawson Murray Limited, the Toronto advertising agency I mentioned at the beginning of my speech and to which Mr. Robson belonged, received a contract worth \$234,000. I may add, Mr. Speaker, that during that time Mr. Robson remained employed by this advertising agency, in the private sector. In fact, the contract was for the Bank of Canada, an agency or organization that falls under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Finance.

• (1420)

[English]

I can understand Government spokesmen throughout Question Period this week attempting to defend the facts on the floor of the House of Commons, but any sensible person exercising a modicum of common sense and judgment would recognize that the facts in themselves are indefensible. The concern here has to be surely that this kind of situation not be repeated.

The Ministry of Finance, as all Members know, outside of the Prime Minister's office itself is the most sensitive Ministry in Government. I would say with all due respect to the Deputy Prime Minister, who is also the Minister of National Defence, that it has a level of sensitivity even exceeding that of the Minister's, the major department for which he is responsible.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that we cannot have people from the private sector engaged as volunteers to work in the office of Ministers, who are not on the Government payroll, who have not signed the conflict of interest guidelines, and who are sworn. We are told that Mr. Robson did not have access to secret documents. Having been a Minister of a Government myself, I find that quite remarkable because that is precisely why all personnel, exempt staff and others, not only take the oath of office, but are required to sign the conflict of interest guidelines. We cannot leave the perception with the Canadian public that private individuals are retained on such a basis by any Ministry, and in this case the Ministry of Finance, in a position to have access to secret and sensitive information and are not bound to observe the conflict of interest guidelines.

Mr. Lewis: Naturally you threw money at them.

Mr. Johnston: I am not sure who said that, but I will find out. I will respond in due course.

Mr. Lewis: It was me.

Mr. Johnston: There is the offender. There will be a period of questions afterward, Mr. Speaker. I know that Members of this House will be fair in the assessment of these facts. I know individually and collectively they will applaud the replies given by their Ministers on the front-benches when questions are put to them on this very sensitive and difficult matter; I realize that. I realize that is the reality of a political alliance and solidarity across the floor of the House. But I ask each of them to search deep within their own consciences to determine whether that is the way they expect the Government of this nation to be run. I do not believe they approve of these facts any more than we do on the Opposition benches or any more than the people of Canada do, who have commented on the facts that have been brought to their attention.

Bear in mind, Mr. Speaker, that not only did Mr. Robson enjoy this rather unique privilege, this probably unprecedented position in a Ministry and as I said, the Ministry of Finance, but these events happened during the period when that very Ministry was preparing its November economic statement