

Supply

She was approaching the same corporations and the same individuals who were in the process of negotiating directly with her husband for loans and grants to the tune of millions of dollars.

Mr. Mantha: What about your husband?

Ms. Copps: I ask the Hon. Member for Nipissing (Mr. Mantha): How about my husband? My husband has never had a loan or grant from the Government. That type of comment is just indicative of the level of sleaziness in this Parliament and the Progressive Conservatives. It is not even worth the energy to respond.

I believe Canadians understand what integrity is. They understand that when the Prime Minister writes a letter suggesting that the Minister has done an exemplary job and should be congratulated, he is sending a message to every Minister of the Crown that they will be congratulated if they stick their fingers in the cookie jar.

Instead, the Prime Minister should have cut his visit short. He should have returned home and laid down the law to his Ministers by telling them that they are here for the good of the public and Canada, not for the good of their own family businesses.

[Translation]

And as long as he keeps silent on that issue, Mr. Speaker, he gives every Canadian man and woman the impression that he himself, the Prime Minister, is there to help his friends, the friends who helped him. When he ran for the Conservative Party leadership, who helped him? The same Ministers, that same Minister that he is now supporting in this new Government crisis. Why does the Prime Minister not send a clear and direct message to the Canadian people, and especially to his Ministers, telling them: You are not allowed, either yourself or through your spouses, to benefit from your roles and responsibilities as Ministers of the Crown.

● (1710)

[English]

As long as the Prime Minister remains silent on this issue, he is as guilty as the Minister involved. He is showing the Canadian people that he has contempt for the system and is in politics and power for what he can get from the public purse and not for what he can do for his country.

I urge the Prime Minister and all members of the Conservative Party to take seriously the question of what they can do for their country, because as long as they uphold this wall of silence in the face of the clear conflict of interest of the Minister responsible, they are doing a disservice not only to their Party and to this Parliament, but to each and every Canadian who has the right to believe in the integrity of the system.

I believe in the integrity of the system. That is why I am here. I would suggest that government Members take a look at

their own consciences and ask themselves why they are here. If they are here for the same reasons as I am, they should denounce the actions of the Minister and his family in this regard.

Mr. Nunziata: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague, the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps), about the conduct of the Acting Prime Minister (Mr. Nielsen). He is a Minister of the Crown who has become known as the master stonewaller. Over the last two weeks, the Acting Prime Minister has tried in vain to build a stone of wall around the former Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion and around the Government. I am sure you are familiar, Mr. Speaker, with the old saying: "You can stonewall some of the people some of the time but you cannot stonewall all of the people all the time". The Acting Prime Minister has tried over the last two weeks to stonewall the people of Canada and he has failed.

What is at issue is the Acting Prime Minister's judgment. The Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion has resigned. We say he resigned because of his conduct. He tried to make excuses. What we are now mostly concerned about is the conduct of the Acting Prime Minister and that of the Prime Minister. The Acting Prime Minister is the same Minister who had the audacity to stand up and defend himself against the "bugging" incident. He said he did nothing wrong. Only as a result of public opinion did he stand up in this House and apologize. The same Acting Prime Minister defended the former Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, only to have that former Minister resign. The same Acting Prime Minister defended the former Solicitor General, who ended up being manoeuvred out of his position by the Prime Minister. The Acting Prime Minister also defended the Minister of the Environment, and the list goes on and on.

My question to my colleague is with respect to the conduct and judgment of the Acting Prime Minister. Does she believe that his conduct has been appropriate? Does she believe that the conduct of the Acting Prime Minister sets an example of high moral standards to which this House and this Parliament must aspire?

Ms. Copps: Mr. Speaker, I think the actions of the Acting Prime Minister certainly do bear some public scrutiny. I believe his intention right from the beginning was to block the free flow of information in the House of Commons by daily stonewalling. He believed, as did the Prime Minister, who no doubt was involved in the political machinations surrounding this fiasco from the beginning, that since the Prime Minister was leaving the country and going on a world tour, making deals in Japan and South Korea and travelling through China, that somehow the opposition Parties would allow this issue to die down. The Acting Prime Minister was sent in, as is usually his role, as a stonewaller, as a government Member who refuses to answer a single question put to him and as a fireman who will put out the fire which has been burning for the last number of days.