

Supply

I sat down and I waited. The Prime Minister twitched but did not quite make it to his feet. The Minister of Supply and Services rose, and between some interjections said: "The guidelines indicate . . .", "Because . . ." and:

Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Supply and Services I am responsible for contracting for some \$7 billion worth of goods and services each year—

As the Minister responsible, it is up to me to ensure that all guidelines respecting conflict of interest are satisfied. I assured myself that all guidelines were satisfied. I repeat, I think it was a great contract. I would do it again tomorrow if the opportunity came up.

Again I point out that no one was asking whether the firm in question was competent, capable or able to undertake good and valuable work on behalf of the people of Canada. Therefore, the answer given again by the Minister of Supply and Services, since the Prime Minister refused to answer, was not the answer to the question to which we were attempting to get an answer.

I went away and I thought: How can I ask this question so that the Prime Minister will understand it? Maybe there is a barrier between his seat and mine which makes it difficult for him to comprehend fully the nature of the English language that I use. I went back, I sat down and I thought: How will I ask the question? I came to the conclusion from a number of discussions that I held that the way to ask the question was in fact the way I had asked the question, that there could be no simpler way. I had not used very large words. I had tried to get them into some sort of grammatical acceptability. Then I rose on the following day, on April 25, and as reported at page 4108 of *Hansard* I said to the Prime Minister:

Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. It is the question I asked yesterday to which I did not receive a reply. Does the Prime Minister believe that it is appropriate for a relative of a Cabinet Minister to receive benefit from an untendered contract with the Government?

This time the Prime Minister heard me. I could tell because his eyes lit up, and he rose ever so slowly to his feet. He looked across the floor with a small smile at the corner of his lip and he said:

Mr. Speaker, I indicated to the Member yesterday—

Well, that was the first mistake, because the truth of it is that he did not indicate anything to me "yesterday". He had refused to answer the day before. I quietly, as is always my practice, leaned forward in my seat and I said:

You didn't answer me yesterday.

He looked across, lowered his glasses somewhat in the fashion I am doing now, and he said:

If not to the Hon. Member, then to one of his colleagues, surely. I indicated that at the earliest possible moment—and they are in the process of being completed now—in both instances, with regard to the conduct of Cabinet Ministers as Ministers of the Crown, and with regard to tendering procedures and granting of contracts, we would bring in new guidelines with new degrees of severity. I think those guidelines will be of service to the House and will be very, very frugal in regard to taxpayers' dollars.

I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that that was a nice answer and no doubt would have been very suitable had there been a question addressed with regard to that particular problem. But

that was not the question, as you well know, Sir. The question was quite different. So I said to the Prime Minister:

—I am delighted to hear that—

And I am. I continued:

—but it is not the answer to my question. My question is quite simple. Does the Prime Minister believe that it is appropriate for a relative of a Cabinet Minister to receive the benefit of an untendered contract with the Government of Canada?

There were certain Hon. Members who, picking up on the nuances, together said: "Untendered", and the Prime Minister responded:

Mr. Speaker, you have a situation where a Canadian citizen tenders to the Government or—

"Tenders to the Government"; that was his second mistake. There is a problem here in communicating across the floor of the House. He continued:

—services are made available to the Government of Canada and public servants, pursuant to objective criteria, make a determination. I suppose that you may have a question as to whether the relatives of anyone in this House at any time can have any association with the Government, and it is a question which will be considered in the guidelines. But I think my hon. friend, in asking the question, which perhaps inadvertently casts aspersions on an agency should recognize that a half a million dollars a year of the taxpayers' money has been saved because of that and I think Canadian taxpayers are delighted.

I put that on the record to show that in spite of the simplicity of the question, it seems to be impossible to get an answer from the Prime Minister. It was not a complicated question. It was not even double-barrelled. It had no preamble, neither did it have any reference to anything to do with guidelines. It made no reference to the public service. It made no reference to the benefits which flow to Canadian taxpayers. All it did was ask: Is it appropriate for a relative of a Cabinet Minister to receive the benefit from an untendered contract with the Government of Canada?

I believe the public of Canada has the right to know the answer to that question. I want to make something perfectly clear. I do not object to businesses having a relationship with the Government of Canada, provided that that relationship is arm's length and provided that any benefit which flows from that relationship should come from the proper tendering process. If it so happens that in one of those businesses there happens to be a relative of a government member or a Cabinet Minister, I do not object to that. I do not expect everyone immediately to leave every line of work simply because one of their relatives gets elected to the Government. I do not expect that everyone who happens to have a relative in Cabinet should be refused the opportunity to participate in the business of the nation. I do not suggest that that should be the case. I do suggest, however, that it should only be done in circumstances in which there is an open bidding and tendering arrangement and, if that company with that relative should win the tender, it should do so on the basis of whether it is the lowest price providing the highest service. That is all we are asking; that is all we ever asked. What aggravates me and what aggravates other people outside is that there has been no such response from the Government to deal with that question. That is what is wrong.