

Supply

That is a broken promise, one that has been broken not only by the Prime Minister but by all his Government. I call the attention of the Government to the kind of model which the Social Democrats have pioneered in many nations of the world, rather than this propaganda mentality which says that the only information that will come out is that which is favourable to the Conservative Party.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Are there any questions or comments?

Mr. Guilbault (Saint-Jacques): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Cassidy). Since he represents the Ottawa Centre constituency, he must have had the opportunity over the weekend to see his constituents, as we all do, to discuss some of these issues. Could he let us in on any reaction he may have had from civil servants who are likely to be affected by these guidelines?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Cassidy: Mr. Speaker, I will remind the Hon. Member the response of the Public Service Alliance which has quite correctly detected the dangers of the policy just stated by the government. I have had a few reactions from public servants but I think that many are frankly afraid to speak openly with a member of the opposition. It will take a little time. Then some of them will perhaps begin to show some courage. However, it is a good thing that some officials could discuss with me the impact of cuts, for example at the National Research Council. They knew quite well that they were taking some risks since the government had clearly said that even factual information given to the opposition about the impact of the cuts could jeopardize their careers.

[*English*]

I believe if that were the case in the early days, the elaboration of the policy as it is now being explained by the Government will simply continue that chilling effect where people will have to meet members of the Opposition in parking garages. They will be making clandestine appointments late at night. This will turn 250,000 civil servants into a bunch of "deep throats", Mr. Speaker. They will have no other option in terms of how they get necessary information, which they believe it is their duty to communicate, because, as the Minister of Communications seems to indicate, factual information, entirely factual information even, will not be permitted to get out if it is unfavourable to the Government.

Mr. McDermid: Mr. Speaker, is the Hon. Member aware of the document which was produced in July, 1981 entitled, "Communication Roles and Responsibilities" which the previous government put out? Does he not think that the present guidelines as laid down by the Right Hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) are far more fair, far more reasonable and will promote more openness than those restrictive guidelines the Liberals had in their heyday?

Mr. Cassidy: Mr. Speaker, if the Hon. member looks and compares the guidelines set out by the Conservative Govern-

ment in 1979 and then the guidelines set out in 1980 by the Liberals, he will find they are similar. They are almost the same. The guidelines set out last week are drawn largely from that source, with the exception that there is a prohibition on off-the-record interviews. That in itself has a chilling effect. But it is what surrounds those guidelines in terms of the directive about communication policies to deputy ministers, the designation of spokespeople and the way the Government has behaved with respect to information over its first 75 days in office that has created such disquiet, in my opinion, not just among us on the opposition benches but among people working for the civil service as a whole.

The Hon. Member asked whether I am not upset over the guidelines that existed under the former Liberal government. Yes, I am, Mr. Speaker. As Mr. Mulroney said in August in Kingston—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Order, please.

Mr. Cassidy: I beg your pardon, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister. As the Prime Minister said in August in Kingston, the present Government believes that people have only a limited right to know. I beg your pardon, Mr. Speaker. I have to ask for your forbearance. I will change. It is difficult for me to accustom myself to different rules.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): If I bring it to your attention often enough, I am sure you will.

Mr. Cassidy: I think you will, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Cassidy: As the present Prime Minister said in August, the present Government believes people only have a limited right to know. He was referring to the guidelines that existed in 1981. If he believed those guidelines were wrong, why has he made them more restrictive rather than more open?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The period for questions and comments is now over. The Hon. Minister for Supply and Services (Mr. Andre).

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Supply and Services): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to direct a comment to the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Cassidy) and suggest that he try to make up his mind. On the one hand he offered as an example the Swedish procedure where apparently anybody can look at any letter. Yet, on the other hand, he criticizes the guidelines that suggest that when our public servants talk in that open way to the media they must also identify themselves. Surely you cannot have it both ways, Mr. Speaker. You cannot call it sinister when, first, it is suggested that when you talk to the media you are to be identified, and, second, it is suggested that you keep things open.

Mr. Cassidy: Make everything public. This is news management.