

*Supply*

constituents—and I expect that the same is true in many other ridings—are watching debates in the House and have a considerable interest in questions which come before us. Sometimes the debates may leave something to be desired, but Canadians have an interest in the questions before us.

Given the confusion that has been reigning in the last few minutes, it may be worth repeating some of the details or some of the information involved in this case in order to sharpen the question. Those who tuned in late and are involved in listening to this stage of the debate, not having read their newspapers faithfully and so on, may wonder whether or not some of the darts being tossed are on target.

The question involves the granting of a contract for advertising savings bonds. It involves the granting of a contract which someone who was involved in this kind of work during the term of the last Government says is very easy. In fact, this kind of work was described as a beautiful hand-out, patronage. It is also clear in looking at the way in which this contract was arrived at that the last Government followed practices very much like this one. Some of the darts being tossed back and forth involve Liberals and Conservatives in the old slanging matches.

● (1600)

The people of Canada are wondering exactly what is going on. In this information about how it was done, is it possible that the Minister of Finance did act with propriety and that there is nothing wrong with the Government? What are the means by which this hand-out to an advertising agency is carried out? It is apparently in the hands of the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. de Cotret) rather than the Minister of Finance. A recommendation is made by a committee of the Government. When we examine the personnel of that committee, we get a better sense of how these things are done. We are told that soon after taking office, this Government fired the three Liberals who had been in charge of the federal advertising management group. It put in two Tory activists. When we see that, it becomes clear that this is the basis for this kind of activity. When we are told that one of the people appointed was Robert Byron, a former advertising executive with Case Associates Ltd. of Toronto, who directed constituency services for the Conservative Party in the federal election campaign last year, we may well assume the Mr. Byron had some fair knowledge of who the Tory investors are across this country, particularly those in cities like Toronto, who have significant business positions and who now deserve to benefit from the new Government.

When we are told that the other person, Jean Pélouquin, a Montreal advertising executive who was a member of the Tory communications strategy group in Quebec during the last campaign, we say to ourselves that here is someone who would know perfectly well who the advertisers are in that part of the country and probably had some fair awareness of who they are in other areas.

What we have is work that is not very difficult, probably overpaid, given that it is this kind of a plum or hand-out to an

agency. The people who are looking at it are former Conservative Party officials who were appointed to this group to manage it for the benefit of their friends. When they look the field over and settle on an agency, which happens to have the brother-in-law of the Minister of Finance in it, it presumably does not bother them that this gentleman is in an executive position, that the advertising contract involves the Ministry of Finance. That does not matter. Something over a quarter of a million dollars is going to go to this agency. The fact that it means extra revenue for the firm is just the way these things work.

The people of Canada are interested in these matters, particularly ordinary Canadians who have very little hope of ever benefiting from a Government which likes to cut expenditures wherever possible and to restrain spending, no matter what the consequences may be for them. Those ordinary Canadians have a considerable interest in exactly how this new Government operates. They are not going to be impressed when they realize that this Government, which promised change in various areas, carried on through the fall using guidelines which are clearly inadequate, which the previous Government had used, produced no change except a personnel change.

These Canadians are going to ask themselves whether taxpayers' money is being squandered, is going to the profit of relatives and friends of the new Government at their expense without gaining the country any great advantage. To be told that this is past practice and the President of the Treasury Board need not apologize to anyone for having done these things is outrageous. The people of Canada can only be strengthened in their cynicism that they feel about Government, that the Tories are no better than the Liberals, that the Government is out for the advantage it can get for its friends and relatives, not the people of Canada generally. They can only be convinced that good Government is going to be impossible.

Government falls into disrepute by behaviour of this sort. If there is one thing that I hold against Governments and Parties that do this sort of thing, it is exactly that sense of disreputable Government, the cynicism about Government that it engenders in the minds of ordinary Canadians. When I see Hon. Members shaking their heads and questioning that, I wonder where their moral sense is. Clearly partisanship takes over and people cease to worry about proper behaviour and propriety in these circumstances.

Our motion focuses on the granting of a contract. In the debate this afternoon there has been a failure to answer the question about whether this is acceptable or not acceptable. It is an indication of a certain measure of unease. The curious thing is that there has been some tightening up in the guidelines. That surely suggests that the behaviour last fall was not acceptable, that this sort of thing should not happen. If the head is shaking, it means that the regulations have not been tightened up. One then has only to grieve the fact that there has been no improvement.