

Oral Questions

complied with. Presumably that means it is permissible for a relative of a Cabinet Minister to obtain a quarter of a million dollar contract from the Government without being the lowest bid. Will the Prime Minister confirm that the guidelines are so deficient in this respect and, if so, will he undertake that within 24 hours he will change the guidelines to make it impossible for a relative of a Minister of the Crown to get a contract without having even to be the lowest bidder?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): I will confirm that the guidelines, the ones we inherited, were that deficient as applied by the Liberals. They have since been very seriously upgraded to accommodate the legitimate concern of my hon. friend. They have been very substantially improved to protect the interests of the Canadian taxpayer, and we will be happy to file them at your earliest convenience.

Mr. Broadbent: I regret to say, as is his wont, he did not answer the question.

Mr. Mulroney: I did answer the question.

Mr. Broadbent: No, you did not.

Mr. Mulroney: Ask your question.

Mr. Broadbent: I will ask the question specifically.

LETTING OF CONTRACTS

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, do the guidelines now in existence, which the Prime Minister brought in, prohibit a relative of a Minister of the Crown from getting a contract without being the lowest bidder? If they do not contain that provision, why does he not make the change and put that in the guidelines?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Supply and Services): Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Broadbent: I thought you were going to answer.

Mr. Andre: —as I said to Members of the House, and I believe to the Leader of the NDP previously this year, advertising is not let by tender anywhere in the world where they have advertising. What we have introduced is a procedure whereby there will be a degree of competition permitted within the practices of this profession by having several agencies, three, four, or five agencies, make a representation to a panel of public servants—a panel of public servants—to select from amongst those agencies that one which will represent that Department in its activities during the course of the year. I do not know what else could be fairer than to have public servants make the selection. This is an innovation which certainly Premier Pawley has not in place, nor did David Barrett, nor any other former or current Premier of whom I am aware.

Mr. Broadbent: I can inform the Minister, in so far as he considers it relevant, that the Government of Manitoba awarded contracts not long ago to two firms which had worked for the previous Tory Government. That has been the practice of Premier Pawley.

GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSIBILITY

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister, who made such an issue of patronage in the last campaign. There is a role to be played in making a judgment about certain kinds of submissions on advertising contracts which do not necessarily go to the lowest bidder. We agree with that. But would the Prime Minister not agree that there is a distinction between permitting relatives of Ministers of the Crown to get contracts of that kind, which do not go to the lowest bidder, and getting contracts where they have to meet the lowest bid requirement? Surely there is a distinction, and surely it is the Government's responsibility to avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest. When will the Prime Minister live up to his commitment to make a fundamental change in the whole patronage system of this country?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): But we have.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mulroney: We have.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Listen.

Mr. Mulroney: If my hon. friend cares to listen—

Mr. Tobin: Ronald Reagan was an actor who went into politics, and you're a politician who should go into acting. Your nose is growing.

Mr. Mulroney: Now we have heard from the latest success story in Newfoundland after that last election. The fact of the matter is that there has been a very serious change made, and I think my hon. friend would agree. The manner in which tenders come forward is that they are analysed, the bids are brought forward, proposals are made, and they are left, for the first time, to the ultimate determination and adjudication by a panel not of politicians but of distinguished public servants. I cannot think of what would be fairer or more honourable and consistent with what I know my friend realizes to be an obligation of the Government to proceed in an orderly manner.

My hon. friend phrases questions mixing that practice, which I think is a very healthy administrative change, one that benefits Parliament, with the question of patronage, and criticizes us. I noticed no criticism from him when we appointed distinguished people like Paul David, Dick Doyle, or Sylvia Gold, noted for her association with the NDP. We do not think that disqualifies Ms. Gold from playing a prominent role in