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evidence to shore up his argument here? He may do that. Hon. Members know that very well.

Mr. Lanthier: Mr. Speaker, you are right if you assume that the only source of my remarks, irrelevant though they may appear, are arguments which have already been made.

Last night the *Caisses populaires*—represented not by one individual or only by the president but by the entire board of directors—stated formally that they supported the Minister. We did not have any choice, it was our moral and contractual responsibility to do what we are doing now, it was quite clear. The people were disappointed when they asked that question. Their answer was unequivocal and there was no arm twisting, Mr. Speaker.

Those people support the Government. The National Bank which had been accused of being a regional institution but has branches in five Canadian provinces where it is strongly represented said the same thing last night: those people fully support the Government in this operation, not only the rescue operation but the other operation whereby all depositors will get their money back.

So if I may, Mr. Speaker, I think those things need to be said if we want to set the record straight. If anything at all has been twisted, it was not the arms of bankers but rather the truth as the tired Liberal Opposition sees it.

Mr. Speaker, I think reference was then made to decisions taken without full knowledge of the facts. Earlier someone said something about remarks allegedly made by some bankers who apparently offered the services of their staff to make an audit. What they omit to say, Mr. Speaker, is that the offer was accepted. The books were audited by the Inspector General of Banks with the help of experts sent by the banks.

Of course, we were under pressure. But the banks... the Canadian Bankers' Association said that it had been involved in the study. The Bankers' Association was invited. All the big bankers, that weekend, were not on holiday but on duty. And the bail-out of the Canadian Commercial Bank was endorsed by all and they all had the choice to open or not to open the bank on Monday morning. Everybody decided to open the bank. It was a common decision, a joint venture, a partnership. This decision was not imposed by the Government.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the decision regarding both banks that some tried to lump together in the debate tonight, in particular the Northland Bank, was I believe a difficult one to take. I am proud that it was taken by such a responsible and able person as our Minister of State for Finance (Mrs. McDougall). Her integrity is unquestionable and her decisions have been endorsed by all the leading experts on banking institutions in Canada. I wish I had been there when they took the reverse position and when the Opposition Leader was called to order by our valiant Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) when they said to him: Bring out the real facts or, if you are unable

to prove them, say it outside the House, and then we will be armed to ask you questions.

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, this institution was endorsed by the leading banking institutions. We have taken our contractual and moral responsibilities towards all Canadian citizens and the decision was not only made by an honest and able person but also with full knowledge of the facts... I am happy not to have been cornered into taking that decision and I am proud as a Canadian that it was taken by such an able person.

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa-Vanier): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the House whether we could let our pages go, as well as some of those who work for members of Parliament in the lobbies, before we go on with the debate. I wish to thank them and if there is unanimous consent, we might let the pages go home.

An Hon. Member: This is very kind of you.

● (2250)

[English]

Mr. Speaker: I am sure the Pages also appreciate, as I do, the suggestion of the Hon. Member. That possibility has been investigated. As you can imagine, I was interested in that subject a little while ago, and I am told by the Pages that, this being such a rare experience, they would be interested in staying.

However, what I am going to do is to advise the Clerks in charge of the system that those Pages who wish to stay may stay and those Pages who wish to go may go.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Except for the two right in front of me. I am not put into a difficulty, but I think rotation will solve that problem.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg-Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, I think your comment—

An Hon. Member: Let's hear the truth now.

Mr. Axworthy: Mr. Speaker, I think your comment is an opportune introduction to my remarks, when you say that the Pages would be most reluctant to leave as this is such a rare opportunity.

There is no question that Canadians would have found in these days in Ottawa an incredibly rare and rich opportunity to tune up on one of the most bizarre and incredible occurrences in the history of the Government of this Canada. I am sure that Canadians tuning in on their television sets mistakenly thought that they had found a new comedy series called "Amateur Night on the Rideau". When trying to look at their new Government, they are seeing perhaps one of the most incredible records of bumbling and fumbling and stumbling that has ever been accomplished in so short a period by so many people at this time. Really, we do not have to go through the events of the last 48 or 64 hours, because each day and