

Government Orders

That is worrisome because, as I mentioned at the beginning, before Question Period, that somewhat reflects the government mind-set, first of all, not to act firmly about waste, not to reduce waste in government expenditures. That also reflects a lack of transparency by the government, despite its intention, its desire, as stated in the red book, to encourage transparency in government.

It is as if they wanted to hide information, as if there were something fishy, things that could not be disclosed, things that the minister and his department are trying to hide. Is it because it is too complicated? Why is it that elected government people cannot obtain information on contracts given by the government in public works and government services? Certainly, it is because of a lack of concern for transparency. And that is the least of our concerns.

I know, for example, that in the case of contracts awarded by the federal government, Quebec has always been short-changed. If you consider Quebec's contribution to the federal level and the share of public works and service contracts that Quebec should receive, the figure should be approximately 25 per cent and at least 23 per cent of all contracts. For a long time now—10, 15, perhaps 20 years—Quebec has been getting much less.

Last year for example, in 1993, the province was awarded 16 per cent of all contracts. It was 15 per cent in 1992 and 13 per cent in 1991. When you think that contracts awarded by the federal government are worth a total of \$30 billion or more, this is a considerable loss for Quebec. It amounts to approximately \$200 million a year. They may be trying to hide the extent of these losses.

In any case, there are hidden facts, there is a lack of openness on the part of the government. We would like to suggest at least some improvements. Unfortunately, Bill C-52 deals only with minor matters and moves things around and does not improve the operation of the Department of Public Works. With this in mind, the Bloc would like to make constructive, positive and concrete suggestions.

For example, the legislation should require that regular notices, say for example monthly notices, be given of all contracts awarded by Public Works and Government Services.

• (1230)

Normally, this should be included in Bill C-52. These notices should be public and easily available and provide data by federal riding, region and province. Such a measure would keep the members of this House informed on what is going on in the Department of Public Works so they would be in a position to exercise their discretion and disclose cases of misuse or waste.

We also want to make a second recommendation. The responsibility for public tenders should be decentralized in order that offices of federal members of all parties be more involved in the process, that members be consulted, or at least informed of the awarding process in the case of government contracts regarding their riding. This is not complicated. It is normal for the members to be informed of the federal government contracts in their ridings, so that they can shed some light on some of these contracts, play a positive role and do something about cases of waste or abuse.

We would even have another recommendation which would be to adopt a precise code or agreement on subcontracting in Bill C-52 in order for the government and the public servants to know the government's intentions regarding this practice which has been a policy for some time now. The very complex subcontracting infrastructure costs more than \$5 billion at the federal level.

Over the last three to five years, subcontracting has increased at an alarming rate because the government never established a policy in this regard and has no guidelines indicating whether subcontracting would or would not be profitable for the government. We opened the door to subcontracting with all the problems we are experiencing now and there are no guidelines. We would have liked to see some guidelines in Bill C-52 or a code for the government to deal with subcontracting.

We have another suggestion for the government. It might be time to give the federal civil servants the right to blow the whistle on the waste of money in the public service, because they know what is going on, but they cannot make anything public. Obviously, if public servants had that right, as is apparently the case in some American states right now, they would not only be more accountable for their job, but I am sure there would be less waste in government contracts.

Even if that suggestion goes through, some steps would have to be taken to ensure that public servants with that right would be protected and would not use it against their supervisors. We must provide some measures to make sure that exposure of abuse and waste by public servants works satisfactorily, and would be useful to the government.

• (1235)

In conclusion, following what I said this morning about the lack of openness of this government in awarding contracts at the Department of Public Works, and there are many of them, the lack of will of this government to give teeth to Bill C-52, while it is such an important department, because of all the contracts that are awarded every year—150,000, 175,000—because of the amounts involved and mostly because of the doubts that we have about waste within the government, in order to allow that department to become more open and more accountable toward elected representatives we would like to propose an amendment