

*Government Organization*

among a certain type of individuals. In my opinion, however, it is rather a cave of conflicting personalities. There is no such feeling at the government level which is responsible for these top positions. Of this, it has given signal proof for the past three or four years, to the point of getting blamed, in Anglo-Saxon circles, for opening too wide its doors to the French-Canadian side.

It was only fair for me, Mr. Chairman, to put the record straight in the house.

[*English*]

**Mr. Skoberg:** Mr. Chairman, I should like to congratulate the minister on his very brief outline of the bill. If the bill were as simple as his explanation of it I am sure there would be no questions on either side of the house in regard to the implementation of its provisions so far as the proposed Department of Supply and Services is concerned.

In the short time I have I should like to refer very briefly to supply and services as they pertain to consulting services and the types of contracts that are let which, as the minister suggested, will be under his supervision. I noted from the minister's remarks that these new services were optional. The minister assumes responsibility for management consulting services for individual departments.

Sometimes questions arise not only in the minds of members of parliament but also among the vast majority of the public in regard to the letting of contracts for government services, including both Crown corporations and individual departments. I should like to point out that I have six questions on the order paper dating back to December 3. I should like to refer to one in particular as I believe reference to it will outline the situation generally. I asked the government the following question:

What are the government regulations with regards to the hiring of consultants, including advertising consultants, in order to assist government departments i.e., in the areas of planning, studies, feasibility reports, economic analysis, legal assistance, architectural advice, etc.?

The question then goes on to deal with other matters. If this question and the many others I have put on the order paper had been answered by now, many of the disappointments I have at the moment would have been removed. There appears to be some reason for not disclosing advice given by consultants generally, and I hope that when the minister replies he will relieve any fears I have about the hiring of such consultants.

● (4:50 p.m.)

Tenders for construction contracts are invited by public advertisement. Tenders are invited for purchase or service contracts by public advertisement, or a representative list or lists of suppliers is submitted. The intent of the pertinent regulations is not clear. It is bad practice for departments of government to choose consultants or other outside professional people who will be of service to that department from a preferred list. Also, there should be no preferred list of suppliers of any other services. I do not think that management consultant firms on the proposed list ought to be employed to the exclusion of other, similar firms. Many suppliers or firms of consultants will go to almost any lengths to be put on a preferred list. What bothers many in this house is that by employing firms on preferred lists the government may be indulging in political patronage, something we do not like to see. In fact, the preferred list could lead directly to political patronage.

Wherever possible I submit that Crown corporations should be included under this department as under the present regulations it is provided that these corporations may be included, but not necessarily. In advertising for tenders for any job the government should not be guided by any firms that may be on a preferred list. Suppliers of every service ought to be employed on their merits and not on the ground of political patronage. I hope the minister will clarify this matter later. Very often when a department retains a favoured consultant it is found that the consultant's report contains exactly what departmental officials wish to see. I suggest that in any democratic process this sort of thing is bad.

Some time ago the hon. member for Fundy-Royal asked in the house whether the government had considered implementing reforms similar to those applied in Sweden in this field. The recommendations and findings of consulting firms are not always made available to members of parliament, and this is bad. I agree that in special instances it is not in the public interest for such recommendations or findings to be divulged; yet I cannot help feeling that withholding such information is undemocratic. Speaking in the house on February 17 of this year the President of the Treasury Board said in part, as reported at page 5631 of *Hansard*:

There are a number of instances in which investigations are sought, in which proposals are asked for or information is sought, which it would not be in the public interest to disclose.