

Oral Questions

Mr. Mulroney: Very few Members have left such a forgettable impression upon this place as has the Hon. Member. When compared with the remarkable accomplishments and universal acclaim of the reputation of the Hon. Minister of Finance, I can say without hesitation or fear of contradiction that the Canadian people very much support the integrity of the Minister of Finance because they know it is there 100 per cent.

RECEIPT OF BENEFITS

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, I noticed that when the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain asked a supplementary question of the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister was rising to answer the question when the Minister of Supply and Services rose. I would like to give the Prime Minister another opportunity to answer the question. Does the Prime Minister think it is appropriate for a relative of a Cabinet Minister to receive benefits from an untendered contract?

● (1440)

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to my erstwhile friend, the Leader of the NDP, who is probably yours, too, the guidelines were being tightened up, and we are very much in need of them in the conduct of public life.

Mr. Benjamin: Is it appropriate?

Mr. Mulroney: No, in a perfect world—and, of course, the NDP believes that things are always perfect—there would not be the slightest problem at any time. I will acknowledge that from time to time administrative difficulties arise, particularly when a new Government comes in and inherits guidelines, and new situations come up. I will acknowledge that everything is not perfect. But we conducted ourselves honourably and we are bringing in new guidelines to improve upon that. I would hope that would satisfy my hon. friend.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

APPLICATION OF GUIDELINES

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Prime Minister once again does he think it is appropriate for a relative of a Cabinet Minister to receive benefits from an untendered contract. If he does not think it is appropriate, and if that was possible under the old guidelines but not under the new guidelines, then why did he not order his Cabinet to behave in that way? Why does the Minister of Supply and Services keep insisting that he is happy with everything that happened in accordance with the old guidelines, if the Prime Minister feels that there is a need for new ones?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I think my hon. friend perhaps is not making the essential

distinction between the two sets of guidelines to which reference has been made. One was raised by my right hon. friend, the Leader of the Opposition, the day after we came in, after I had conveyed to them the guidelines for the conduct of individuals as Cabinet Ministers and Ministers of the Crown. I then assigned, in writing, the Deputy Prime Minister to review all of the guidelines with regard to Ministers of the Crown and their conduct, with a view to enhancing them and tightening them up. The Deputy Prime Minister has done that, and those will be filed with you very shortly.

With regard to the inheritance which we received, and the guidelines with respect to the tendering apparatus for the awarding of public contracts, the Minister of Supply and Services took the decision independent of me or any other Minister, according to objective criteria. He inserted public servants into that decision-making process.

In both cases there was no violation of any guideline at any time. What we have done is enhanced the severity, properly, of both sets of guidelines to ensure that the Canadian people are well served by their public servants.

REQUEST THAT MINISTER OFFER RESIGNATION

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Saint-Maurice): Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct a question to the Minister of Finance. I have been observing the situation for the last three days very carefully—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Chrétien:—and I know how important it is for the Minister of Finance to be above reproach.

In view of the fact that the Minister of Finance will bring down a Budget in a month, and in view of the fact that everyone recognizes that we are not questioning the integrity of the Minister of Finance but his judgment—he made an error in judgment in letting the contract go to his brother-in-law and his former assistant—will the Minister of Finance do what he should do under the circumstances, and offer his resignation, to relieve the Prime Minister of having to defend him on a daily basis in the House?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Supply and Services): Mr. Speaker, because of the premise of the question from the Hon. Member for Saint-Maurice, I will repeat what my colleague has said again and again, and which I have also stated in the House. The contract in question was let by me, by my Department. It had nothing to do with the Minister of Finance. It was let by my Department. If anybody has a conflict of interest it has to be me. Again, the contract ended up saving the taxpayers a ton of money, and I am proud of it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

RESIGNATION SOUGHT

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Saint-Maurice): Mr. Speaker, as the Ministry of Finance was the client of the Department of