

Government Orders

terms of the government's policy thrust, or did not need in such numbers.

For example, the ACOA board is going to be reduced from 18 members to 7. There were vacancies on that board, but it would have been foolhardy for the minister responsible, my friend from Cape Breton—East Richmond, to rush in and appoint those people, knowing full well it was the government's intention to reduce the size of the board.

As far as the second part of his question is concerned I say to my friend from Kitchener that I think I alluded to that in my speech when I said that both Liberal and Conservative governments over the past have been guilty of what I described—what I defined first but then described in the context—as corrupt patronage, where you appoint people of a particular party label for that reason alone, not because of their competence to do the job.

A party label ought not to be the reason for the appointment, but it should not exclude one from receiving such an appointment. That was my point. A fair amount of it has gone on in the past. What is more to the point is that since the government took office I believe it has been fairly diligent. It has had 150 backbenchers keeping an eye on it, as well as the opposition. It has been fairly diligent on this matter. I do not honestly believe that one can make much of a case that there has been an orgy of patronage under this administration.

Mr. Pat O'Brien (London—Middlesex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to congratulate my colleague for his very interesting remarks and ask him to share his experience with us on this point.

All too often in my view we have heard—as he said in his remarks—names put forward that because there is some sort of party connection, that person should somehow be disqualified. Does the member in his experience feel that when a person levels that sort of a charge, there should be an onus on that person to show the individual appointed is in fact unqualified for the position? To do otherwise is just to smear people who may have this or that political affiliation, if that is the sole reason. It is my view that the onus should be on the accuser to put the case when they make the accusation.

• (1740)

I wonder if the member would share his experience and his point of view on that idea.

Mr. Simmons: Mr. Speaker, I do not get my jollies by smearing people and I do not think that sets me above anybody in the Chamber. I do not think anybody in the Chamber really gets their jollies out of it. Sometimes we fall into the trap of doing it. I have fallen into that trap over the years myself, but that does not make it right.

Just now when I singled out an example of an earlier speaker in this debate—not only one speaker, two or three speakers—I did not name names. That would have defeated the point I was making that one smear does not justify a second smear because the thing just grows.

It seems to me, and I think I said it in my speech, that if people have concerns about the system and document those concerns—I recognize that some arithmetic has to be done—then those people have this label or those people do not have those qualifications. I submit that can be done without naming names and make the same point.

I would submit that the law of averages says that of all the people appointed, I dare say some of the 700 I mentioned just now cannot do their jobs. Of the 295 members of Parliament, probably some of them cannot do their job either. The law of averages takes care of those. Nobody is going to suggest that every one of the 700 appointments is absolutely brilliant. Some of them were, I would guess, clumsy, stunned appointments.

But that is different than saying that somebody is sitting here full time asking: "How can we warp the system so that only incompetent Liberals get all the jobs and nobody else will get any"? Well, if that is the thesis, prove it but do not smear people along the way.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to enter into this debate. I have just a couple of comments on the previous speaker's comments on patronage.

First I refer to the picture he has of the cow. I remember from history class another famous cartoon of a cow. Perhaps some other time he would like to comment on it. It is a picture of a cow kind of straddling the Canadian map. It is foraging on the east coast, being milked dry in Ottawa and its rear end is pointed toward the west. That is a famous cartoon. It is kind of humorous but sometimes I think there is an element of truth in it too.

On the definition of patronage, what causes concern for many of us on this side of the House is that the Liberals campaigned so hard against it. The red book comments on patronage. The definition of a patron includes someone who is a former owner of a slave. I guess depending on how you think their commitment is to the party that appointed them, a patronage appointment has a negative side to it.

I rise today to speak to this latest legislative initiative of the government, Bill C-65, which gives legal force to an announcement made by the the Minister of Public Service Renewal on the day that he announced the downsizing of a number of federal government boards eliminating 150 patronage positions. I assume he thinks that is a good thing. I certainly do. He even announced the abolition of seven councils and advisory boards.