

Oral Questions

I ask the Acting Prime Minister, who has now defended this practice of patronage and indicates that it is intended to continue it as usual, to tell the House how the people of Canada can be guaranteed that regulatory and appeal agencies will be able to function free of suspicion and bias when so many members of those regulatory and appeal agencies are affiliated with the political party which forms the government whose actions are being regulated or appealed?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has a good point when he raises the question of the competence of individuals who may be appointed. I have never thought that participation in the public life of Canada should constitute a bar to appointments in various aspects of the public service. I have no hesitation in saying that I believe, experience gained in public life often constitutes a useful "plus" in the filling of these appointments. If you examine the list of persons enumerated in this morning's newspaper, you will find a collection of talented people who may have served in the Liberal party. They may have been ministers or candidates. At the same time, they should not be barred from public service. Among the persons on the list to which the hon. member referred are appointees to the courts. I do not think the hon. member would suggest that persons appointed to the courts by either party would demonstrate, or in the past have demonstrated, any bias in their work.

I believe the same judgment applies to those who may be appointed to regulatory agencies. Perhaps I have a little longer memory than the hon. member has, because I was in the House when the right hon. member for Prince Albert used to appoint eminent gentlemen of the Conservative party to such bodies.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, may I ask another supplementary question? I cannot dispute the length of the memory of the Acting Prime Minister. Indeed, the length of that memory has probably contributed to the appointment of a number of the people whose qualifications we have some cause to question.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An hon. Member: Name one.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): You are really feeling the heat on the government side.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, nobody would dispute that participation in public life should not be a bar to those kinds of appointments. The question is whether participation in public life during that intensive two-month training period which people go through as candidates in the losing cause of the Liberal party should in itself be regarded as the only qualification for appointment to the public service. I notice the Acting Prime Minister avoided, or tried to put aside, the question of the reputation of freedom from bias of regulatory agencies and appeal bodies. I should like him to address his mind to the response to this question: How are we going to guarantee that

[Mr. Clark.]

the reputation or independence, so essential for regulatory agencies and appeal bodies, will be safeguarded when so many members of those bodies have been appointed for reasons which, on the face of it, appear to relate strongly—too strongly—to political loyalty to the party whose decisions as a government are being appealed or regulated? How are we to have that safeguarding of the reputation of bodies which, unless known by the public of Canada to be functioning independently, are not able to do their jobs?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I believe the strongest guarantee against such evidence of bias is the integrity of the persons appointed. I do not think there is any other guarantee.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): That is the point.

Mr. MacEachen: I have already referred to appointments to the judiciary. I think it is the experience of all of us that when you select persons of integrity, as we attempt to do, for that work and for other regulatory bodies, they shed their bias and do their job in the public interest. If the hon. member has any evidence to the contrary, I am sure he will bring it to the attention of the government.

● (1420)

Mr. Clark: What is of concern to us is not so much the integrity of the individuals appointed as the integrity of the government appointing them.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: We on this side of the House question that. Another aspect on which I would like to allow the Acting Prime Minister to try his hand, if he will, is the matter of Crown corporations. The list this morning indicates—again make it clear that it was not a complete list—that that has been a guiding factor, to say the least, in the appointment of members to the boards of directors of Crown corporations in this country. In recent months there has been much concern about the efficiency and the regularity, in some cases, of the operation of Canadian Crown corporations. Can the Acting Prime Minister in his eloquent, long-minded, long-remembered, defence of patronage tell this House and the people of Canada so that they can have a guarantee that Canadian money will not be wasted and that Canadian policy will not be made badly by boards of directors of Crown corporations when they are appointed, not because of their knowledge of the subject matter with which that Crown corporation deals but because of their loyalty to the Liberal party of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I think the Leader of the Opposition and I disagree on that point. I believe these persons are selected on the basis of the contribution they make to the work of the public service. I must say that when I looked at the list this morning I was quite impressed with the quality of persons who were available for this kind of service in Canada. The hon. member should keep this in perspective by recalling