

Government Orders

Well, if we take a close look at this bill, if this is supposed to be renewed federalism, it is not moving very fast. As the hon. member for the Reform Party said earlier, it may be the right direction but progress is slow.

The hon. member for Outremont has the audacity to criticize Quebecers with regard to the proposed commission on the future of Quebec and to accuse us of not being democratic in our approach. He prefers the kind of back room democracy that assumes that voters, all these people who are listening, will believe anything.

To claim that Bill C-65 marks an impressive change is to assume that people do not know enough to tell the difference between a thunder clap and a fart.

• (1615)

Because when all is said and done, what the government has produced with Bill C-65 is a mere fart, a fart they are trying to disguise as an impressive roll of thunder, a portent of fundamental changes to the government's apparatus. But under all the rhetoric it is just a fart, and one has to call it that because this lingering odour of—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I was not listening to the interpretation. I do not know how it was translated. However, I would like to ask all members to co-operate by using the most appropriate wording possible.

Mr. Marchand: Mr. Speaker, to use a more stylish expression, let us say that there is a significant gap between reality and what is being proposed. If we put things in perspective, we realize that the federal Liberal government is making fun of people, as did the hon. member for Outremont when he exaggerated with a little smile on his face.

Bill C-65 does provide for the reorganization of certain agencies and commissions. The number of members of some 15 boards is reduced from 12 to nine, while other agencies are dissolved. For example, the Canadian saltfish corporation is abolished, and it is not too soon. After all, it has been a long time since there was any saltfish to sell; yet, that corporation is still in existence. Such a measure is obviously appropriate, as are all the other changes proposed in Bill C-65. These changes obviously make a lot of sense.

I could mention other examples. In the past, there were such excesses that the least we can do is to make these cuts; in fact, we should go even farther. Indeed, this is the problem with this bill: the government barely cuts into the fat because, once again, there is the issue of patronage, of appointments made by the government to reward long time members and friends of the party, as well as those who helped get the Prime Minister elected. All in all, some 125 patronage positions, out of a total of close to 3,000, are being abolished. This is a small step in the right direction, and we are told that it will result in savings of

about one million dollars. This is said to be a very important saving for the government.

To put this in perspective, I would like to remind you that while eliminating a few patronage appointments will apparently lead to one million dollars in savings, the government has already taken a few billion dollars from the unemployed in Canada and is constantly finding all kinds of ways to attack the poor. For example, with regard to public housing, 110,000 Quebec households will soon see their rent increased by about 30 per cent. These 110,000 households who live in low cost or co-operative housing are among the poorest in our society. Their average income is about \$10,000 a year.

• (1620)

The government drags its heels when it comes to making significant cuts in patronage appointments, and yet it does not hesitate to take \$500 more a year from the poor, who earn just \$10,000 a year, in order to recover \$26 million. This is only in Quebec, but it has already happened in other provinces. The government has already succeeded in increasing the rent in most provinces.

The government is giving the impression that it is cutting the fat, but it is really keeping the patronage system in place and making marginal cuts while increasing the burden that the poorest people in our society must bear.

So I am extremely disappointed when I see Liberal members rise in this House to say that Bill C-65 represents an important shift in the Liberal policy. People should understand that Bill C-65 brings only minor changes.

The elimination of 125 to 150 patronage appointments out of a total of nearly 3,000 is obviously a good thing; I cannot say that it is bad. The government is cutting some fat, but if it could eliminate half of these appointments, it would really show its willingness to reduce patronage, as it promised to do in the red book during the election campaign.

The current prime minister had indeed said that he would change the patronage appointment process and abolish or at least reduce such appointments. Now, with this decision, the government is reducing a number of patronage appointments, without however changing the whole system; the patronage appointment system remains the same. This is only the Liberal version of what went on these last eight or nine years under the Conservatives. The same type of patronage goes on, despite all the promises to get rid of it.

The director of Liberal appointments, Penny Collenette, the spouse of our Minister of National Defence, said in 1993, not long after the election of the Liberal Party, that the selection criteria for these appointments would rather be based on capacity, merit, integrity, honesty, and community service. In fact, Mrs. Collenette was only trying to reiterate to Canadians and convince them that things were about to change.