

Oral Questions

separatists who do not have the courage of their convictions and who are trying to sell them something they do not want to buy.

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● (1440)

[English]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, last May when the justice minister was attempting to justify the Liberal patronage appointments that his revenue minister wanted for Vancouver Island crown counsel positions, he said that the sole criterion for their appointment was that of competence.

Well, their competence showed up last week when one of the Liberal appointees turned up in a Nanaimo court totally unprepared, incapable of proceeding, and a serious drug case was thrown out. Is this the Liberal justice department's measure of competence?

Mr. Russell MacLellan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the Minister of Justice said on these appointments still holds true.

The matter to which the hon. member refers is an incident where perhaps more through an administrative mix-up the new agent was unable to get the files for the court. It had nothing to do with the agent's competence. The matter is being looked into by the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, this particular case has been before the court since September 1993, a full two years.

In addition to this case, in Victoria last week another Liberal appointee turned up in the court unable to even qualify with an ordinary argument for law in the court. That case was thrown out.

In a second case in Victoria the crown prosecution witnesses turned up but surprisingly the crown prosecutor did not. That case was thrown out.

When is the justice department going to wake up?

Mr. Russell MacLellan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the agent is unable to get the information and unable to get the files then the agent cannot do the job if the agent is not granted a postponement by the court. If this is the case, as I believe it may well be, then certainly there is nothing whatever to discredit the agent.

As I have said, the Minister of Justice is looking into this matter.

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[Translation]

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Osvaldo Nunez (Bourassa, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. His department has speeded up citizenship processing in Quebec since the referendum campaign has begun. Never, in any recent provincial or federal election, had such an extensive operation been undertaken to issue certificates of citizenship. Because of this accelerated process, more than 15,000 new citizens will be able to vote in the upcoming referendum.

How can the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration justify this eagerness to expedite the processing of citizenship applications in Quebec, when his own officials have confirmed that never before had such an extensive operation been conducted just before an election anywhere in Canada?

[English]

Hon. Sergio Marchi (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is being done with respect to citizenship processing in the province of Quebec leading up to the referendum is nothing different from any lead up to any provincial campaign.

My department has done likewise with the provinces of Manitoba, New Brunswick and Ontario. If we compare the number of citizenship processings with the year of the Ontario election, it is up some 45 per cent.

Is the hon. member suggesting that we should somehow slow down the process? Is the hon. member suggesting that it is not proper to have the persons exercise their democratic right to vote? Exactly what is his point?

Mr. Osvaldo Nunez (Bourassa, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in my case it took one year to become a citizen, and the minister did not do that before the elections in Ontario and New Brunswick.

[Translation]

Will the minister admit that the explanation for his sudden concern for democracy can be found in the letter he sends all new citizens, asking them to help build a strong and united Canada.

[English]

Hon. Sergio Marchi (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is wrong on both counts.

The government does not assume how newcomers or immigrants will vote. Perhaps the party on the other side is assuming somehow that new immigrants will vote a different way from the intention of their party. That is not my business as minister of