

Opinion

Patronage is an inherent part of NB politics

By DERWIN GOWAN

Patronage is a widely conversed topic for those behind the scenes in New Brunswick politics. This is true despite government rhetoric in praise of our new system of competitive examinations.

As a matter of fact, Tory hacks are being put into awkward positions because of the present situation. Not only do they have to confront frontal allegations of blatant patronage, which the present government handles fairly

well, but they are now getting it from their own partisans.

Now it might seem strange that the Tories would be down on a Tory government on the patronage issue, but when you take a look at the present situation, it is rather logical why this should be the case. To see this, one has to take a look at the political developments in Canada and New Brunswick for the last decade.

1960 was the big election in the Picture Province. The much revered Hugh John Fleming was

turned from office and a youthful Louis Robichaud took over. The Liberals were not very satisfied with the Conservative Government, and all remnants of it were spurned.

People lost jobs left and right, and the government appointed their own to make sure their own were in control. In the still Conservative areas of the province, the local populace smarted severely as people representing what they considered a minority of their constituency handed out the

political goodies. This writer can document at least one Liberal worker who got himself a nice cushy position in 1960 or shortly after, and four years later he wrote his civil service exam.

Now, we shouldn't be too hard on them for that, because, as any Canadian historian will attest to, such practices were not new by any means to any political organization that ever reached and attained power in this country.

However, be that as it may, Conservatives and people hired

before 1960 who managed to keep their jobs (usually Conservatives), as well as those hired by competitive examination resented this.

In 1970, they were to have their revenge, that is, one Richard Hatfield came to power. They expected a few changes to come about, and this is where the present back room troubles for the Tories began.

Hatfield has stressed honesty in politics as a campaign issue and has repeatedly stated that we must build up public confidence in our political system. This meant that the civil service commission was to be given more power in hiring people and the back room hacks were to be phased out, as having outlived their usefulness or something like that.

This also meant that there was not to be any widespread firings such as had characterized our politics in the past come election time, particularly in the higher up positions. The interesting thing is that it also applied to the personnel departments.

Although I was in the earlier stages of politicization of the time, I can still remember conversations going around the school yard something to this effect - "Well, I guess your old man heads for the manpower centre tomorrow." "Yeah, it looks that way," was the reply.

However, as I pointed out before, people did not get fired on as large a scale as in 1960. This meant, although there were party committees to oversee the hiring and firing in each riding, the higher up civil servants of the last regime were still kept on. You may have heard the not so old saying - "The Tories act like the Opposition even when they are the government, and the Liberals act like they are the government even when they are the official Opposition."

This writer can document cases where civil servants known to be pro-Conservative have been denied promotions that they were in order for both in terms of seniority and job qualifications. He could also come up with a larger list of Conservatives who are not pleased a little bit with the performance of the Hatfield government in this respect for the last five years. Indeed, some die in the wool Tories were even known to have purposely abstained from voting in the last provincial general election. Note that the Liberals seem to be generally quiet on this issue.

Informed sources tell me that the government may be doing a little fence-mending in this area. In fact, the same sources say this topic was referred to in the recent closed Fredericton South Tory meeting.

Well, I will be the last person to stand up for a full scale patronage system, but, insofar as we must put up with political favoritism, it might as well be in favour of the government and not the official Opposition.

Aitken House elects

Aitken House has elected its new House Committee for the 1975-76 academic year.

Tom Wilson is the new president and Peter Davidson was returned for the spot of Vice-president and Treasurer. Peter Neilly was returned as Sports Convenor. Bill Small is the House Disciplinarian and Jim Dunnet is in charge of physical facilities.

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