

Supply—Secretary of State

Why require that they be bilingual when both languages are official in this country? If both languages are official, let us be fair towards all Canadians, whether they be English or French speaking.

I hope that the minister will remain favourably disposed without ever becoming an extremist. We do not expect an English speaking Canadian stationed in the Yukon to know French. We only wish that a premium be granted to a bilingual civil servant who works in the central administration at Ottawa.

French Canadians or English Canadians should not be forced to speak a second language because the future of Canada will suffer from it. As a matter of fact, if there is now, unfortunately, a wave of extremism in some areas of Canada, a situation which I deplore very much, it is precisely because there might be a lack of understanding and a lack of justice on the part of some Canadians.

Mr. Lamontagne: Mr. Chairman, just a few words to answer some questions asked by hon. members.

First I want to point out to the hon. member for Joliette-L'Assomption-Montcalm (Mr. Pigeon) that I made a preliminary report to the committee last week about bilingualism within the civil service, and I am convinced the hon. member will benefit from reading the statement I made then.

Indeed, the progress made in that field during the past year is only a start and I am sure that during consideration of my estimates next year, I will be in a position to report that other important measures have been taken in that respect.

I should like to point out to the hon. member for Carleton (Mr. Francis) that the question he mentioned, that of examinations to determine the degree of bilingualism, does constitute an important and complicated problem.

I am convinced that the school of languages which has now been set up in Hull will provide us with new data and, possibly, with a new method of determining the various degrees of bilingualism. I am equally confident that the civil service commission will benefit from the progress made in that field and that it will be able to improve its present examinations for civil servants.

[Text]

The hon. member for Oxford listed a series of grievances with respect to the civil service commission and I am sure the commission will give serious consideration to what he said. As I stated last Thursday evening, the whole

system of classification is now under review, and I am further informed that the commission is setting up a new division to re-examine this situation, especially with regard to collective bargaining which is on its way.

Dealing with older employees I would like to point out that 25 per cent of the appointees in 1963 were over 40 years of age. Perhaps there may be some improvement necessary but at this stage I think that is quite an achievement. I would hope private industry could show a similar record.

[Translation]

Mr. Grégoire: Mr. Chairman, in respect to the civil service commission, the whole Canadian civil service is concerned. In my opinion, there has been an improvement in the last two years in the field of bilingualism. I think that this commission shows a lot of good will.

There is no question, as a few members said a while ago, to try and ask all civil service employees to be perfectly bilingual. I think that one cannot ask those who carry the mail in Toronto or Vancouver to speak both languages. It is the same for letter carriers in Jonquière or Quebec city; I do not feel that it is essential for them to speak English.

Today problems are facing the civil servant, whether it be in the unemployment insurance commission, the income tax branch, the administration of old age pensions or of the family allowances act, or in any other department. There is the problem of the individual with whom he is dealing and the problem of the act he has before him, an act amended on several occasions in recent years. Then we see a civil servant who is perhaps individually a very intelligent and a very competent man, but because he is faced with many regulations and acts, as well as with numerous persons who come to see him to try and solve their problems, he rather tends to follow strictly the letter of the law—it is a way of thinking which has established itself in the civil service—when in view of the complications of the law and of cases submitted the civil service commission should try and make innovations, instead of considering every government employee as a mere machine in the face of regulations, but as individuals using their judgment, besides enforcing the law, using their imagination and initiative, not only in order to follow the law, but to go beyond and above it, which might be called reasoning according to each individual case placed before them.