

Supply—Secretary of State

Mr. Lamontagne: I am sure we all share the views expressed about Mr. Castonguay by the hon. member but, as was pointed out by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, his important new responsibilities as representation commissioner will require a lot of his time if we are to implement the new redistribution system during the next few years. Mr. Castonguay will continue with his present responsibility as chief electoral officer until we are in a position to make a new appointment. However, I am afraid it will be impossible for him to carry on the two jobs indefinitely.

Mr. Winch: After the redistribution is complete, will Mr. Castonguay carry on in the office of commissioner or will he return to carry out the duties of chief electoral officer?

Mr. Lamontagne: I understand that when a new chief electoral officer is appointed he will be responsible to the representation commissioner, so we may not lose the services and the experience of Mr. Castonguay completely.

Mr. Winch: Do I understand that whoever is given the new appointment will be responsible to Mr. Castonguay and that final authority will still rest with him?

Mr. Lamontagne: I believe that if the hon. member would refer to the act he would find this to be the case.

Mr. Nesbitt: I gather that the concern in the mind of the Secretary of State and, indeed, in the mind of the government is that if Mr. Castonguay is made representation commissioner he could not obviously carry out his duties in the event of an election taking place at the same time. However, if a federal election were to come before Mr. Castonguay had completed his work as commissioner there would obviously be no great hurry for him to complete the task of redistribution. What would be the objection to his having leave of absence, as it were, so as to take charge of the election arrangements? Afterwards he could return to complete his other job.

Mr. Lamontagne: I understand that the act requires each commission to end its work within a year. Moreover, once we have made the appointment of chief electoral officer it would not be easy to ask the new man to vacate his responsibilities.

Mr. Nesbitt: The Secretary of State is correct in accordance with the present terms of the legislation but there are a great many of us in this house—in fact, I think, most of

us in all parts of the house—who would hate to lose the services of Mr. Castonguay as chief electoral officer. It is true that in his other appointment he may have a supervisory capacity but many of us are disturbed about the thought of losing his services in this regard, and I am wondering whether the Secretary of State could not consult with his colleagues and insert some amendment into the redistribution bill which might allow Mr. Castonguay to take temporary leave of absence to carry out the duties of chief electoral officer before returning to his duties as representation commissioner, if a general election were to come after the appointment had been made.

Mr. Lamontagne: Should an election come before the new appointment is made then, of course, Mr. Castonguay would be in charge of that election. However, we certainly cannot delay this appointment indefinitely; and I might add that no date for the new election has yet been announced.

Mr. Nesbitt: Perhaps the whole difficulty could be obviated if the Secretary of State were to consult his colleagues over the week end. Possibly some minor amendment could be made in the redistribution bill which would allow Mr. Castonguay to leave the one office for a temporary period so as to act as chief electoral officer should an election take place. In that event it would not make much difference if redistribution were completed within one year or say, 15 months after the election had been called.

Mr. Lamontagne: I will be happy to discuss this with my colleagues during the week end.

Mr. Macquarrie: There is one small matter. I will not ask the minister to tell us the date of the next election, but the senior standing committee of the house, the committee on privileges and elections, did a great deal of work on the Canada Elections Act last session and I wonder if it would be correct to assume that since the chief electoral officer has sent supplies out to the constituencies it is the thinking of the government that no further consideration shall be given to the elections act, and the careful scrutiny the committee gave it. Important suggestions were made as to the lowering of the voting age, and so on. I have been trying to elicit some information on this subject from the leader of the house. Perhaps the hon. gentleman could bring us up to date as to the government's thinking in this regard.