

Supply—Secretary of State

Mr. Deputy Speaker: When shall the bill be read a third time?

Some hon. Members: Next sitting.

Mr. Knowles: In view of the many amendments that have been made, I think we should not have third reading until we see a reprint of the bill.

Mr. Pickersgill: I very much regret that hon. members do not see fit to give it third reading now. I would have liked to get this thing completed today, but of course the rules are against me.

Mr. Lambert: If the minister will just cast his mind back a few years to the time when he was on this side he will recall that he took the same position with regard to bills of this importance and complexity in which many changes had been made, notwithstanding the pleas of the government. This is not with the idea of getting back at anybody. I think a bill of this nature, with this number of amendments, should be reprinted before it is given third reading. We give an undertaking that we will see it Monday afternoon.

Mr. Pickersgill: I would not like it to be thought I was complaining, but one can always hope.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: When shall the bill be read a third time?

Some hon. Members: Next sitting.

SUPPLY

The house in committee of supply, Mr. Lamoureux in the chair.

The Chairman: It being one o'clock I do leave the chair.

At one o'clock the committee took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The committee resumed at 2.30 p.m.

SECRETARY OF STATE

Office of the chief electoral officer—

1. Salaries and expenses of office, \$106,000.

The Deputy Chairman: Shall the item carry?

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Chairman, as hon. members know, the position of chief electoral officer is being filled on an acting basis by Mr. Castonguay, who is also representation commissioner. In fact I think the latter is his principal job because it is for it he gets paid. Up until this point it would seem to present

[The Chairman.]

no difficulty in having Mr. Castonguay fill both these positions, but now that the redistribution bill may soon be passed Mr. Castonguay will have to devote a great deal of time to his work as a member of ten provincial commissions. That being the case, would it not seem desirable to make an early move toward filling the position of chief electoral officer?

I am not fishing for a prediction as to the date of the next election. The Secretary of State is probably no smarter than the rest of us on that point.

Mr. Lamontagne: We would not want to move on this until the redistribution bill has been finally approved, but the hon. member may be quite sure that we will try to find a suitable replacement as soon as possible.

Mr. Knowles: Does "as soon as possible" mean within the next few weeks so that Mr. Castonguay may devote his full time to the representation job and not have to worry about the possibility of having to conduct another election?

Mr. Lamontagne: Provided we can find a suitable candidate for the job, it will be within the next few weeks.

Mr. Winch: Do I understand that on Mr. Castonguay's appointment as representation commissioner he will not have authority as chief electoral officer? If that is the case, then I want to register my opposition because I believe he and his father before him have done wonderful work as chief electoral officers.

I should like to speak briefly about Mr. Castonguay himself. One may not always agree with his decisions, but based on my years of experience campaigning for federal office I doubt if in the history of Canada there has ever been anyone like Mr. Castonguay, with such a knowledge of the Canada Elections Act and with such decisiveness in reaching conclusions when required during the heat of an election.

Though I can appreciate the reasons he is to have such important responsibility in the matter of redistribution, personally I would very much dislike it if some person is named as chief electoral officer without Mr. Castonguay having overriding responsibility. Does passage of the redistribution bill mean that we will lose the services of Mr. Castonguay as chief electoral officer? I repeat that I would hate to see the day come when he will not have some responsibility in the electoral and campaign system of this country.