

Judges Act

will bring back the necessary balance in the judicial district of Trois-Rivières, and the general public will be most pleased with this measure, for there has been a considerable delay in the hearing of civil cases in the last few years.

I wish to congratulate the Minister of Justice (Mr. Cardin) for this initiative which will be well received by the people in the judicial district of Trois-Rivières, and will give them justice.

• (3:40 p.m.)

[*English*]

Mr. Lambert: There is one minor question I should like to direct to the Minister of Justice. The resolution refers to the appointment of one additional judge to the district court of Alberta. I find some difficulty in identifying that jurisdiction precisely. It had been my belief that so far as the province of Alberta is concerned the district court was composed of two judicial districts, one for northern Alberta and one for southern Alberta, that appointment to one of these two district courts was exclusive of the other and that an appointment to the District Court of Southern Alberta had no application whatsoever to the District Court of Northern Alberta.

I do not wish to appear niggling, but if my thinking is correct the resolution would need to be more specific concerning whether it is dealing with southern or northern Alberta.

Mr. Cardin: Perhaps I can answer that question quickly. The additional judge is for the district of northern Alberta and in particular for the city of Edmonton.

Mr. Lambert: The appointment is to the whole of northern Alberta; there is no particular locality. I thank the minister for his information.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Asselin (Charlevoix): Mr. Chairman, I would like to say just a few words about the resolution now under consideration.

Needless to say that this resolution will be welcomed by the bar of the province of Quebec, but I wish to point out to the minister that there is still a shortage of judges in the district of Quebec.

In fact, in the judicial district of Saguenay, where I practise, as in the district of Haute-Rive, there are about 800 or 900 civil cases pending and that is a source of great prejudice to ordinary men.

[Mr. Chrétien.]

There are automobile accident cases which date back four years. They have been on the docket for that length of time and, in the interval, witnesses often disappear. Consequently, when those witnesses cannot be heard, the parties are compelled to arrive at a settlement because the witnesses are dead.

Mr. Chairman, I am of the opinion that because the number of judges is too small in the district of Quebec, great prejudice is done to our taxpayers, and I would call the minister's attention to that point.

I am also of the opinion that the minister should study the advisability of lightening the docket, in order to help our people. In my opinion, he should appoint three new judges in the region of Quebec, which would greatly help to solve our problems.

Mr. Chairman, it has too often been said in this house that the political appointment of our judges in the superior courts or courts of appeal was questionable. As a member of the bar, I wish to protest against that tendency to let the people think that the political appointment of judges is not a good thing.

In my humble opinion, and by experience, when judges are appointed to the superior court or to the court of appeal, in short, to any court, they retain, I am happy to say, that feeling of impartiality about the ordinary man. Just because a man is appointed by a Liberal government or a Conservative government or any other, it does not mean that he does not assume his responsibilities when he becomes a judge.

I once heard a member of the house say that the method of appointing judges should be changed, because the present method is unreliable. I challenge that position and more especially, I protest against leaving the public with the impression that the appointment of a new judge is often unsatisfactory.

I think our governments appoint judges mainly because of the appointee's experience and legal knowledge. I also believe that in addition to that knowledge, a judge must equally be aware of the problems facing our taxpayers. He must have been in touch with the people and, in my opinion, a former member of parliament and government member surely has greater competence, because in addition to his awareness of the people's problems, he knows the problems of the parties involved, which would prove useful to him when called upon to administer justice.

I am not suggesting that the government should not intervene when certain judges behave in a manner derogatory to their